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INTERVIEW WITH DEBORAH SESSLER

INTERVIEW WITH: Deborah Sessler

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Q. -- when we start, to just say your name and the year and the place of your birth.

A. My name is Deborah Sessler and I was born in Amsterdam, Holland, March 6, 1926.

Q. Deborah, could you describe the early years of your life for me?

A. Well, my mother died when I was four years old. I have a sister who is two years younger than I am. And my father was -- at that time, I believe he was about 26 -- never remarried. And put us into some kind -- it's not really an orphanage. You would say it's an orphanage here, but it was only a place where the children had one parent living. And that parent had to help with the education of this child. You see what I mean? They called it an orphanage, but the parents had to help for the upbringing and education. According to a percentage of what my father made, he had to pay to this orphanage.

And we were in there -- we received a very

good education, I mean, up to high school, because I never did go through high school because the Germans took me away. But my sister and I were first -- when my mother died, she went with an aunt of mine for two years and I went with my grandmother for two years. And that didn't work out. My grandmother died and they were going to put one in an orphanage. And then my family came and said, "No way. Both of them in an orphanage." So that's where we went into.

And I had a very good upbringing. I had a very good education, very strict of course. It was actually like a religious school; very Jewish, very Orthodox, you know. Had to learn Hebrew, which was a second language. I don't speak it. I read and write Hebrew. You had to learn it. It was -- besides Dutch, your Hebrew -- was a very, very orthodox school.

Well, I was there until Hitler came into Amsterdam. And from this particular orphanage, or whatever -- Waisenhaus in German, Waisehaus in Dutch -- they took all the 110 children away with their teachers and -- what was she called? Directress or leader or whatever. And that was actually my beginning of my life.

Q. So you were relatively happy in your -- given that your mother had died -- you were leading a relatively happy existence.

Did you go out into the city?

A. Oh, ja. Shabbes we were off. Parents could pick us up. When you were under 16, they had to come and pick you up. Sundays and special days permissions, you could go and see your family. No, it was mostly in the home. It was very restricted. Just women, just girls, I mean. And we had about, I would say about two miles away was the boys, for the boys also. And sometimes we used to get together for concerts and stuff like that. I think as a child I was pretty happy there.

Q. Was your father attentive? Did he spend the day off with you and give you things?

A. Ja. Oh, yes. And every Sunday he used to come in the afternoon and visited us if he didn't go out. And they could bring us candies and fruit and stuff like that, which he never brought. He always brought us toothpaste. And to this day, my sister and I, we both have our own teeth. Is that amazing?

He always gave us grapefruits and toothpaste because as a young man his teeth had to come out and he had false teeth -- I think by the time he was 26 years old. And he was very particular about that, that we had toothpaste and grapefruits. That's all he brought us. We never had any candies. And to this day I am not a big cake or candy eater. You know? So fruits -- I eat a lot

of fruit.

Q. Were you close to your sister?

A. Very close. Very, very close. I still am. I still am. But unfortunately we're 7,000 miles away.

Q. Were you close to the other young girls in the school?

A. Ja, ja. I still have one living -- I think out of the 110 children who were taken away, ten were liberated. Ten girls, it's a pretty good -- awful to say -- it's a pretty good percentage. And one of them lives in Los Angeles. I still see her now and then, and we talk to each other on the phone. Our lives have changed. She's married and has children and I'm married and got children. But, not too many left that -- I was pretty happy there.

Q. Before we go on to the Germans taking you away, and so forth, just to give a sense of your life before that happened, could you just describe a typical day in the board -- it's kind of like a boarding school, I guess, is what we would call it?

A. Yes. Yes. Not a hundred percent boarding school because they didn't have to pay for our full education. They had to pay part of it. And sometimes in a very, very extreme case, they took children in who had no parents. But we had sponsors and they were mostly, of

course, Jewish people -- owners of department stores and banks and stuff like that -- who donated money to that particular place, to the Waisehaus. And that's where they had the money from.

Our day started in the morning. We had to get up at 6:30. You always had a chore before breakfast. Always, every child, when was up to -- started at 12 years old, I believe, or 10 years old -- you had a chore. You either had to clean bathrooms or you had to sweep the bedrooms. There were big halls, you had to do that. You always -- everybody had a little chore to do. And before breakfast there was half an hour shul and half an hour prayer. The bell would ring and you had to go downstairs and you had to pray for a half an hour, and you had a regular service.

And then we had a breakfast. Not very good -- the food was awful. The food was absolutely awful. But, I mean, as a child, you don't really mind that much. I mean, it was very unimportant to you. Much more important are your free time and your playing, and if you're a good ball player and stuff like that. And then you went to school.

Now, I went, you see there were several schools, because, of course, they had children from all -- with all kinds of I.Q.'s and stuff like that. The one

school I went to was the school with the -- well, the girls who had a little bit higher I.Q. There was this special Jewish school where you had -- you learned very fast. That's where I went to, my sister did, too, and so did Linda, who lives in Los Angeles. And we walked every day, rain, shine, snow, whatever. We walk to school and was approximately 25 minutes to walk. We came home for lunch. We had to change our clothes so that your good clothes to school wouldn't get dirty. I show you pictures; I have a book of it.

And we had our lunch, which was awful. I was always hungry there. I really was. So maybe that helped me going through the camp. That's very possible because I hated that food. It was awful. I tell you what it was. And then we went to -- you got changed again and went back to school. And then you were at school to till four o'clock. School started at 9:00 in the morning, 9:00 to 12:00, 2:00 till 4:00. And at four o'clock you came home. You had a lot of chores to do -- maybe set the table for dinner or do some mending some socks or whatever. There was always chores to be done. And then at six o'clock there was dinner.

And then you had dinner. And then people -- after, every week, different girls would do the dishes, you know. There was a team. They put it all up on

boards. Then you had about an hour to do your homework, hour and a half, or you had to read. And you could listen to the radio if that was all done. And then at -- by -- I think that girls till twelve o'clock (sic) had to be in bed by 7:30. The girls up to 12 years old had to be in bed by 7:30. The girls up till 16 years old could stay up till 8:30, and from 16 to 18 till 9:30.

Q. Very regulated.

A. Ja, very regulated. And that -- in those hours actually you could either do your homework, you could read a book, or you could do some knitting. But you always could listen to the radio. They always had nice music on or something like that. That was very nice. You always looked forward. And you specially looked forward to getting older because the older you get, the later you could stay up. You see?

Our food consisted of: In the morning you had some -- couple of pieces of rye bread with margarine -- never butter, and I'm a big butter eater now -- margarine and glass of milk. For lunch you came home. You either had beans or rice or soup, which was impossible to eat. And I don't even know what you call it; I think it was barley. They made out of barley with prunes on it or with apricots on it. Oh, it was absolutely awful. It was terrible.

I had opposite me a lot of girls who ate a lot and I gave to them under the table. But if you were caught, you were punished. And your punishment was Friday night early to bed. And Friday night was the most delightful evening because after dinner they set up all the tables and you got candies and peanuts and lemonade, because it was Shabbes, see?

So that's what they took away from you then if you were caught giving your food away.

Q. Were you skinny?

A. Ja. I was skinny. I always have been skinny all my life. I was skinny, so is my sister. Always skinny. She couldn't eat that stuff either. It was awful. But they did their best, and especially during the war; the food became real bad because there was no more bread to be gotten. We got some porridge in the morning, which I think they made out of cement. Don't ask me, it was awful. It was terrible.

So, this practically the day what we spend in it. I think basically people were happy. They made it very comfortable, as comfortable as they could make it for us. But I think of the discipline and of not being spoiled, like I spoiled my children, I think this is what got me through the camp. I think so because I was used to that certain routine and discipline and no food.

Hygiene was Number 1. That, they were very particular about. You always had to take -- they had showers, baths -- B-days, you know. They were very particular -- very hygienic. You had to wash every time the meal started. They checked you when you walked into the door if your hands were washed. Hygienic, they were very big part, which, of course, in the camp we didn't have. But, they had a lot of people so they had to be careful.

Q. Were there any kind of mother figures there for you or were they just disciplinarian?

A. No mother figures. I never had -- you see, this is one thing I always tell my kid -- I never had a mother.

Q. Not even a substitute?

A. No. Never. Never a person who I could look up to and say, "Gee, that could be my mother." No, never had a mother. And I never had a father much either because my father worked all week and he came on Saturday and Sunday. He came to visit us for a couple of hours or we went to our relatives on Saturday. So I really never had a father, either.

Q. Do you think that maybe the fact that you had had to be so self-reliant and so independent and not be nurtured in that way made the toughness of what was to

come perhaps more bearable, more understandable to you?

A. Ja, absolutely, definitely. See, I didn't know what love was. I really didn't. Because nobody would put his arm around me, which I would do around my children.

Q. What about with your sister?

A. That's a different kind of love. It's togetherness; we did everything for each other. If I had a slice of bread in the camp, I shared it with my sister. There was a different kind of love as when I put my arm around my daughter and say, "Darling, don't worry, I love you anyway." It's a different love as when you say to your sister, "Here have half of piece of my bread." That's a love because I share. But it's a different love, you know? See, I really grew very close to my sister because that's all I had. And now I have my daughter. So...

Q. Can you -- it sounds like your existence was pretty Jewish, constricted and Jewish.

Did you have any contact with Gentiles when you were a child?

A. No. Not allowed to do shopping in Gentile stores not to look at a Christmas tree. I lived in a very Jewish neighborhood in Amsterdam, the Jewish -- what they called later on -- the Jewish ghetto. And we had some

non-Jew -- like Rembrandt was my next door neighbor. I didn't know him, but his house was there, you know. So he lived in Jewish quarters. As you know, Rembrandt grew up in the Jewish quarters. So, I mean, we had some non-Jewish people living in the area, but we were not supposed to look at the Christmas tree. Or if we were caught buying in their stores candies, we were punished --

Q. By them, not by the Jews, by them?

A. By us, ja. By our Jewish people we were punished.

Your greatest joy, really, was Saturday afternoon when you could go and visit your relatives because they would spoil you. I, for instance, had an aunt who used to put a little dish full with butter on the table because she knew I loved butter so much and I didn't get it there, see? And as a child you looked forward to that, you know? So, if you were being caught doing definitely something against the rules on this particular house, you know, where we were in, they took the free time away. You could not go see your family on the Shabbes. You could not go. You had to stay in and read a book.

Q. What was the business about not looking at a Christmas tree? Because they were raising you in a very Orthodox --

A. Jewish.

Q. But was that typical? Do you have any sense of whether that was typical or whether it was just this orthodox setting?

A. I think it was just this orthodox setting, the extreme. This was the extreme, which I will tell you later on, which I went completely against later on when I came out of the camp, you know, because I had considered myself such a terrific young lady when I was younger. I did everything that they told me in the Jewish religion -- what I should do, and what I shouldn't do. And I was such -- I was really 99 percent because I really loved it. I thought it was terrific, and yet I was punished for it.

So I really reversed myself after the war. You know, this is a very big statement to make, but I did. And I had plenty of opportunities to go to Israel. And if it wasn't for my sister, I wouldn't have gone to Israel yet because I wanted to stay away from all the Jewishness because it really punished me and my family. You know, this is the way I felt.

But, once I got married, then I had my children -- it's funny -- it all comes back again, you see? It's so amazing. It is really so amazing that once I saw my boys growing closer to that Bar Mitzvah time, I said, "Oh, my Lord, they have to become Bar Mitzvah." You

know, that was very important to me, you see. And then Friday night my husband and I were off to temple and the kids, once a month, on Friday night went to the temple. And that was very important then.

But when I was a young girl and lived in England and I lived right next door to synagogue. I don't think I stepped in once. Not once did I step into the synagogue. I wanted to stay as far as possible away from anything that was Jewish. And my sister stuck to it. She married a non-Jewish fellow. She stuck to it.

And that, thirty years ago, was a very bad thing to do. Now, it is very much so accepted. Not by everybody yet, but it's much more accepted, the intermarriages, than it was thirty years ago. And Bebe stuck to it. And to this day she doesn't do anything about the religion. Never had any children and would not raise her children Jewish if she ever had one. That is the -- I think the bitterness we had left over from -- you know. We had considered ourselves such good people in that orphanage. You know?

Q. You really tried to follow the rules and do what they taught and not look at Christmas trees.

A. Not going into non-Jewish -- we didn't know any better. I mean, that was a bad thing to do. At Shabbes you could not have money in your pocket, you could

not ride a train or a tram or car. I wouldn't dream of doing a thing like that. That was very much against being an Orthodox Jew.

Q. Did you believe in God?

A. Oh, yes. Oh, yes, I still do. I think that's what got me out, too. Oh, yes, I believe in God. I certainly do.

Q. So when did things start seeming dangerous at all? Was it a complete surprise or was it a creeping up kind of process?

A. Well, they couldn't say very much. Newspapers we never read. We didn't get any newspapers. The news, we didn't listen on the radio. Usually, what they had on the radio was nice classical music or some children shows and stuff like that, you know, where kids would sing and things like that, you know, children hours. But news we never heard. That's why I always say, I really don't know the political side of it.

The only thing is, I must have been around eleven years old and I could see a lot of German children coming into our orphanage. And we were wondering how come because we never had any foreigners. And a lot of Jewish children without parents came into our orphanage, and they took those in. And we learned a little bit of German from them and they learned Dutch, you know. We accepted them,

but that was very strange to us. Not knowing that Hitler was, in 1937, that he was pursuing the Jews already in Germany and that the parents tried to get their kids out of Germany in order to find a country for them which was neutral. As you know, Holland was supposed to be a neutral country. And that was the first thing we actually noticed. But we didn't think. You know?

Q. Did the children ever say anything?

A. No, no. They were our age, they were about, between 8 and 15 years old, somewhere in that area, you know. Just that things were not good in Germany, and their parents had sent them here to Holland, that's all. So, we really didn't know what was going on. And then another thing is, not only our orphanage, but all the Jewish people in Holland didn't think that anything would happen to them. You know, they -- it was a neutral country and Hitler -- that could never happen to them. That could never happen in Holland what happened in Germany.

Q. So how did they perceive themselves, as different or as set apart from that?

A. Because they were protected by the Queen. You see, we were a neutral country and that anything like that, what Hitler was doing in Germany, could not definitely happen in Holland because we were protected.

We were Dutch citizens. They wouldn't come in and burn -- all we heard was that they burned synagogues. We had never heard of concentration camps -- burn synagogues, burn the Torahs, got people out of the houses and killed them and stuff like that. That we did hear. But concentration camps, we never did hear of.

Q. Now, you heard of that when you were, say, eleven?

A. I little bit later than that. Because I was taken away in 1942, and those kids -- I must have been ten years old -- then those kids already started coming in '37, '38, '39. So, you know, when a ten-year-old -- I mean, to me it was much more important that I could play that afternoon with my doll and my little -- um -- (indicating) that I carried the doll in -- that it was my turn that afternoon. That was much more important to me than what those kids were doing. At ten years old, you don't think those things.

But when it was getting a little bit -- when we could see that the food was getting real bad. Our laundry couldn't be sent out anymore. We had to do our own laundry, you see. The Jews could not go to swimming pools no more, and I was just going to learn how to swim. We could not attend the swimming pools anymore. Then we saw those big boards going up in the Jewish ghetto with

Judenstrasse, "Jew street." Then, of course, we could see things were changing. But that was about four, five years later.

Q. So you were 14 or 15 when you really started seeing --

A. By 14 years old I saw the change. By 14 years old I saw the change.

Q. What was your perception of it? What was your -- at what point -- did it ever cross your mind that this might affect you personally?

A. No.

Q. Still felt outside?

A. They were going to protect me. Holland was going to protect me and the orphanage was going to protect me. I felt perfectly safe. Felt perfectly safe there. I think we all did, you know.

Q. So you felt perfectly safe up until the day they came and rounded you up?

A. Exactly.

Q. Could you describe what happened on that day?

A. I do have to tell you beforehand that on Saturdays when we went out -- now, that was just before then -- as I told you, we had our freedom on Saturday afternoon and my father used to pick me up and we -- all

the kids used to go to their relatives. And, you know, you could go to the zoo if you wanted to or you could go to the Jewish organization, JNF, I think it was called. You could go there, spend your afternoon there. You had absolute freedom. They trusted you.

And you wouldn't dare of taking any street car or carrying any money or going into a non-Jewish store. You did it out of respect for that orphanage. This is the way they had taught you. And we always had to be a certain time home, especially when it was getting darker. So, we had to be home, let's say at five o'clock in the afternoon before it was dark, you had to be in. And a couple of Saturday afternoons when we walked home, I could see on the square men sitting, kneeling down; not knowing what it was.

And the whole square was just full with men. And what they had been doing on Saturday afternoons -- we found out later on -- is the Jews usually stayed home Saturday afternoon, especially in the Jewish neighborhood -- they got them all out of the houses and put them on those squares and took them to camps.

That's a couple of times what I saw. Then they would, my father would walk me home, I would say -- I could hear my aunt say, "You think you'll be safe, Max, to walk them back to the orphanage?" And he said, "Oh,

sure. I'm safe." And then I thought, "Well why couldn't he be safe?" You see?

But they were getting all those men. They were rounding every man which looked like a Jew. They rounded up and put them in the squares and they had them sitting on their knees. And we just walked by. We were going to the orphanage. So we could feel some kind of tension already. There was a little bit of attention already. But, we still felt perfectly safe, it's amazing.

And on one morning -- boy, I can't even recall exactly what happened, but -- I think they must have rang the doorbell and they opened and we saw all those SS's coming into the orphanage and all we could hear was, "Schnell, schnell." "Everybody out, everybody out." And, I tried to flee to a neighbor next door and then my sister wouldn't come. And so I came back over the fence again and one of those SS's saw me and started banging on me, hitting me and stuff like that, and yelling in German. I don't know what he was yelling.

There were trucks in front of the house. Wehrmacht trucks with some kind of canvas over it. And we were all pushed into that, including all the teachers and the matrons who took care of us, and the directress and director and stuff like that; they were all pushed in

there. And they set us onto a train. They took us to a train on a train station and just let us sit there all day long without any Wehrmacht, without any SS at all.

I think they really gave us a chance to escape. But, you see, we were so taught to listen to authority, to obey authority, that we didn't dare get out of that train. And I think -- later on my girl friend and I, we talked about it -- how we sat in that train and there was nobody there. And we just sat there and waited. And then finally at nighttime, they took us to Westerbork which is a -- they called it a Durchgangslager, which meant you had to wait there until you were -- until you were chosen to be sent to concentration camp.

Q. How far away was Westerbork? How long did it take to get there?

A. Oh, I would say about an hour, hour and a half by train. You see, Holland is very small. There was just on the border. I think it is in the south of Holland. I don't even know where Westerbork is. I have no intention of going visiting it. But that was a camp, then, where you waited until your number came up.

I mean, you know, there were so many people and they sent so many each week out on a Tuesday always. The trainloads went full, and they shipped them out to concentration camps. We didn't know that. That you found

out once you got into Westerbork.

Q. Can you describe getting off the train and to Westerbork and what your impressions were and what you saw?

A. Camps. Barracks. I was frightened. Ja, I was frightened. I was very frightened. And we were put into barracks where there were two by fours, one, two, three (indicating), and they told you to pick out a spot for you to sleep and stuff like that.

Q. It was a board, just a board for you to sleep on?

A. Well, there was -- I think they had some mattresses on there. I think there were some mattresses on there and some blankets. It was pretty clean there. It wasn't like a concentration camp. It was pretty clean there and we had some decent food. They gave us some soup and bread and stuff like that. I recall that I wasn't very long there because I tell you why.

Now, while I was in that orphanage still, my father had been taken away. And he was in a work camp in Holland. Before they really started those concentration camps they had work camps for the Jewish people. And he was sent to a work camp in 1941. And after six months they send him on a visit home. And he came to visit us. And I said to my father, "Dad, how is it?" And he said,

"It's terrible." I said, "Well, why don't you flee? Why don't you go somewhere?" And he said, "No. They told us to be back, otherwise they kill us."

Q. How long before you were taken away was that?

A. Oh, this must have been about a year. A year before I was, in 1942, beg your pardon, 1942. I was taken away in 1943. 1942. Must have been around 1942. And then he went back. He had a few days. See, they gave him free time, and he went back then I never heard of him again.

And then we came to Westerbork, the following -- I think three days later, all the names in our barracks were called who were going to be the next the Tuesday on transport. And the only ones who were not on there was my director from the orphanage and my sister and I. And I couldn't understand how come we were left out. But anyway, we were not on that list.

So we were blessed, I guess, for a week. And indeed we were. And that transport left. On Tuesday you could not come out of your barracks. You had to stay in there because they rounded everybody up on that station. There was a station there with a long train and they put all those people in and whatever and they transferred them.

Q. How did you find out where those people were going when you got to Westerbork?

A. Didn't know where they were going. They just said they're going into labor camps. That's what they called them; not concentration camps, labor camps.

Q. Were you still surrounded by -- were the girls from the orphanage and all the people still together in one barracks?

A. Mm-hmmm. One barrack. Only they were all taken away, then, that Tuesday.

Q. What were you doing those couple of days while you were there?

A. Nothing. It was just waiting for you to be put onto those trains. And the following day, my sister and I, we were called in to an office and there was a young lady was sitting there typing. And she was typing and she said, "Deborah Komprah (phonetic) and Bertha Komprah (phonetic)?" And we says, "Yes."

"Well, you still have a father living in Holland and we'll wait until he gets here. The three of you will be transported at the same time."

So, I said, "I'm awfully sorry, but I think my father has already been taken out of his home."

"Oh, was he? When?"

And I told her. She said, "Oh, in that

case," she said, "you can be in transport next Tuesday. So you're going to be in transport next Tuesday." So they made a mistake with us and that saved our lives. Because all the other people are killed and we came out.

Q. Where were those people taken?

A. Auschwitz. They were all taken to Auschwitz and they were all gassed. And Bebe and I, because they made an error, we came out. So next Tuesday we went on there with our director, who was at that time 65 years old.

Q. Do you know why she had been set aside?

A. Well, I think they were trying to get her out, she had connections. Because some other people got out, too. Anybody who had some kind of connections with Jewish organizations or Israeli organizations had a chance to get out. I don't know how. I was too young. But that is everywhere, you get that everywhere where you have connections. So they were trying to get her out. She didn't make it, so she was put on the transport. See? And we were sent to Sobibor. We traveled for about, I would say, oh, must have been two nights and three days. And --

Q. In what kind of a train?

A. The regular train. We had -- I think we had the last regular train. It was not a freight train yet.

We had a train where you could sit with windows, a regular train. No food, no nothing.

She was a diabetic, the director. She couldn't take it. They had taken all our belongings away so she couldn't have her shot. So she became very, very ill. And when we arrived in Sobibor on those platforms, they threw practically everybody out of those trains. And my sister and I, we landed on the platform. We got up. We were young; but that poor woman. You know, she was --

Q. The SS?

A. Mm-hmmm. They were waiting for us in Sobibor. I don't know if you have anybody interviewed about Sobibor, but I don't really think it was a camp. I think it was just an extermination -- a place where they -- everybody brought in and they gassed them right away. And we had to stand on "Appell." "Appell" means roll call.

And I was standing -- my sister and I were standing behind each other. And the director, then, at that time she crawled on her feet. 65 years old and she was so sick, she could hardly stand. She had for two days no insulin, and she was standing next to me, and -- well, there goes the authority again. And here comes a German officer up to me and he says to me in German -- thank goodness those German girls had taught us some German in

'37, '38 -- and he says to me in German -- oh, no, wait a minute.

So there comes somebody over the loudspeaker and they said, "We need" -- in German -- "thirty girls who can sew and cook."

So my director says to me she says, "Go, go, you're young girls. You two go."

And we said, "No, we'll stay with you. We'll take care of you."

So here comes the German officer. And he winks at me and he says, "How old are you?"

And I said, "Fifteen."

And he said, "How old is she?"

And I said, "Thirteen."

He said, "Go over there."

I said, "No," in German. "I stay with my mother."

He said, "How old is your mother?"

And I said, "My mother is 65."

And he said, "Zu alt, zu alt. Gehen uber, Gehen uber," in German to me. See? "Too old. Go over there. Go over there."

And so she spoke German, my director, she said, "You heard what he said." And she gave me (indicating) she said, "You go over there. You heard what

the officer told you to do, so you two go over there." And we walked over there.

Out of Sobibor came thirty people alive, and we were one of them. Thirty people came out alive and my sister and I, we were two of them. The rest was all gassed there. Was all gassed. And then they send us on this train --

(END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1.)

(BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2.)

Q. I think right when you had been sent to do the detail with the sewing and the cooking with the thirty girls.

A. Okay. So, we went with the thirty girls -- no, no, it wasn't it was thirty girls -- ja, it was thirty girls that's right. Thirty. Ja, one thing they have told us in Westerbork before we left: Never to volunteer for anything; let them get you. That's what they told us. Don't volunteer. Well, I broke the rules a couple of times.

So, in this respect I had volunteered again. Because he -- you know -- and that officer really winked at me. And he said, "Go over there. She's too old. She's too old." So we went. We said good-bye to -- her name was Miss Frank -- we said good-bye to her, and we told her, "We'll see you later." And we went then with the thirty people.

Well, they put us in the train, in the same train we came in, really. And they let us sit there the rest of the day, no food, no nothing. And the train left and I don't know how long we were in that train. It was dark. It was pitch dark. And then we came out, and now I know where it was, it was in Lublin. We came -- they sent us to Lublin.

Now, Lublin had two camps. One was a concentration camp and the other was considered a work camp. Now, the quota each day into the concentration camp came out of that work camp. There were nationalities from all over; mostly Hungarian Jews, lot of Polish Jews, some German, not too many, and us, the Dutch people, then, but mostly Polish Jews, I would say.

Q. Any non-Jews?

A. Not at that time. No. No. Not at that time. We were sent into the concentration camp and we waited in a cold barrack all day long before they did anything with us. You see, later on, I understand what they did was then talk about what they were going to do with you. And at nighttime they gave us a shower. And later we found out that, too, that sometimes out of those showers there came gas and sometimes water. Well, we had water.

And they send us to the labor camp. And we got in, that was the worst camp ever. That was in Lublin. And they put us into the camp into the barrack and that was two by fours, four things high.

Q. You were still with your sister?

A. Still with my sister. And each barrack had a kapo. A kapo means a -- I think in Polish or Czechoslovakian, I really don't know what language it

is -- it means the organizer of that barrack. And she had her own little room and had all the comfort possible. But I think they were in with the Germans.

Q. What, they were Jewish people?

A. They were Jewish people.

Q. Were you with the other little girls, the other young women who had been selected for this detail?

A. There were thirty girls, you were all put in that barrack.

Q. They were all from Amsterdam? No?

A. No, from Holland. From all over Holland. You know, we were just thirty girls from Holland who had been in Westerbork, had gone to Sobibor, had volunteered for that cooking and that sewing. And they were from all over. And we became quite friendly. And I think twenty of those came out. Twenty of those came out. But we volunteered for a lot of things, which they told us originally in Westerbork not to do.

Q. "They," meaning other Jews who were also waiting there?

A. Ja. Ja. So, we were in Lublin, and we had to drag -- I came on the some kind of a group where we had to shlep stones, big heavy stones, from one part. And you walk with those stones for two or three miles and you throw them in another part. And then those stones --

there was nothing for us to do, nothing. No work, nothing. Then when those stones were all gone, you took those stones and throw them over there. But there were other people who did work there.

Those stones, apparently, which we dragged from one place to another, were cemetery stones, Jewish cemetery stones, where Germans made roads out of. And most men -- there was a men camp there, too -- made those roads. But we didn't know that. You see? And the Germans used to march over those roads, over those Jewish cemetery stones. That we found out later on.

Then we had old clothes we had to move from one part to another. And those were the clothes they took off from the people they killed in the Lublin concentration camp.

Q. Did you know that?

A. Yes. Yes, because we could smell it, this flesh. Every day we could see the ovens burning and the flesh smelling because you can smell that. When people burn is a very strange odor to it, you know. So then we found out that was a concentration camp.

So, what they told you or what the talk in between us all was then try to keep fit. Try to -- don't get sick, for heaven's sake, don't get sick. Try to stay fit because if you get sick, you'll be chosen in the

morning.

Every morning there was naked roll call. Sunshine, snow, rain -- nude -- in the nude, you stood there. And one of those officers on his horse used to come by and pick them out, like that. And those were rounded up and sent into the concentration camp.

Now, my sister became very ill. My sister got pleurisy there. And the funny thing is, I have never yet understood the psychology of the Germans, what they did in those concentration camps. Here they were starving them to death, working them to death, killing them, doing experiments on them, and yet they had hospitals. You could go to a dentist and have your tooth filled. You could literally go to a dentist and have your tooth done, put a filling in it. But the next day you could be picked to be send into the gas chamber.

Q. What have you -- have you come up with any --

A. To this day -- now being in Germany, I should have asked those questions, but -- I testified, you know, in Germany, and I should have asked those questions. But I was so happy to get out of Germany I didn't even want to ask those questions. But, anyway, I never could understand the logic. There was a hospital with real nurses and doctors. And they nurse people to get better. My sister was nursed to get better from her pleurisy.

Q. What is pleurisy?

A. Pleurisy is an infection in the lungs. If you neglected pleurisy you can get tuberculosis from, which she indeed got later on. Okay?

Now, we had rations. We got a small piece of bread a day and a bowl of soup. You had to carry your own little bowl of soup -- your little bowl on your head. And this is the way you got it: At nighttime you had to stand in line and you got your bowl of soup and then they gave you a piece of bread. And you guarded that because that's all you got and you were starved; you were so hungry. Well, I used to take that piece of bread -- and that was black market in the camp -- and I used to go to one of those Polish girls, and they would give me a candy. And I would take that candy to my sister in the hospital.

Q. You traded the piece of bread for a candy?

A. Mm-hmmm. For my sister in the hospital. This is the kind of love that's different than what I was talking about, you see. So I wanted to get my sister out of there because they kept on saying, "She's in there; they're going to take her. They're going to kill her." You see? So indeed she did come out. They got her better.

Q. How long was she in there?

A. Time and days, you don't know. There were no

clocks. There were no calendars. You just go by the sun. When the sun was right above you, you knew it was twelve o'clock. When the sun goes under, approximately, and whether it was cold or hot or whether you thought it was summer, winter, fall, you could -- that's what you went by the time. You didn't know time. You didn't know days. That's very hard for a person to understand, but I don't know how long my sister was in there. I have no idea. I don't know when, and I don't know how long. But she came out of there.

We worked with those stones and with shlepping all those clothes and then sorting those clothes out and then shlepping stones again. And then one day, one of those officers, when we stood on roll call, he said they needed forty girls to work in the marmalade factory. So I said to my sister, "You and I are going. We're dying here anyway. So what can happen to us in a marmalade factory?"

And we talked about it, and I think most of those -- no. About ten of those girls who I came from Sobibor with volunteered for that and went to the marmalade factory, with some other people, some Polish people, some Czechoslovakian, Jewish people, forty. And we figured, what the hell? We were dying because, I mean, it was impossible. You couldn't life on what they gave you

and --

Q. Were you starving?

A. Starving. I had diarrhea and I was starving, and I was as thin as a door nail. I knew I was dying, so was my sister. So we volunteered for that.

Q. Before we get to that, could you describe as we did with the boarding house, which was much less horrific, but could you describe a day in the life of Debbie --

A. Mm-hmmm.

Q. -- in that period?

A. You got up in the morning when the sun wasn't completely up yet. So I guess it must have been, what, around 5:00, 5:30 in the morning. And immediately they would yell, "Heraus, heraus, heraus." That means, "Get up, out, out, out." And you had to stand in Appell. Sometimes you stood for two or three hours on roll call.

Q. Naked?

A. Naked. And then those Germans used to come by and one day they would pick them out, and the other day they didn't. Don't ask me why, but this is the way it was.

And after they had done that, after you had been -- it was around, oh, 8:00, 8:30 by that time -- you started working. And you worked all day long until

night. Like taking those stones on your back, you took them to one place and you walk back again, you took them there. I mean, this is all they did with you. But you worked or there was no lunch hour or nothing. That was unheard of. You only got a piece of bread at night and with a bowl of soup.

And then around five o'clock you came back from your day work and you stood on roll call again. And they counted you again. And God forbid there was one missing, then you stood for six hours in roll call. Because there had to be exactly, every day, so many people there because what --

Q. What happened if somebody was missing?

A. Well, maybe somebody was trying to escape. And they had to find that one and you had to wait roll call for that.

Q. Were you punished, were people punished if somebody had got in away? Were other people punished?

A. No. No. They only just stood there until they found out where that person went to. Was he caught, was he really escaped or whatever had happened to him. Okay?

Then they give you -- and while you stood at roll call, the soup was brought there and you stood in lines of ten. So they came by, you walk back into your

barrack and you ate your bowl of soup and your small piece of bread. And sometimes I didn't eat my piece of bread. And a lot of people didn't. And you waited for next morning because in the morning you got up very hungry. But you found out very often that your bread was stolen, you see. So later on, when I found out that my bread got stolen that often, I just ate it at nighttime. So I had bread and a cup of soup.

Sometimes it went out of hand that they put just -- and they did that out of meanness and -- what is it called? -- to be sadistic. They put a bowl of soup there -- it came in big round tubs, you see -- and they would stand it there and say, "Here's your soup. Go and get it." Well, now, just imagine if there was a hundred people standing there and everybody was going to get the soup and starving. Nobody got any because they was spilled. People were fighting to get their thing in there.

Q. Would you be fighting in there with them?

A. Oh, sure. Oh sure, you had to get your food. They also had another thing, which I didn't understand, either. The non-Jews, the Polish people, used to black market. You see --

Q. They were inmates?

A. No. No, outside. You see around the

concentration camp were electric wiring. And we did a lot with clothes, like I told you. We had to fold clothes, and I believe all those clothes, all that clothes -- the clothing what they took off of the dead people was sent to Germany, including all our jewelry what we wore. When we came into Lublin they put in a little bag with your name on it, all the jewelry you were wearing. I was wearing a little ring what my grandmother had given, and a little necklace and they told us when you came out of the camp you would get that all back. Okay?

So when the people die, they took all their clothes. And we had to fold all those clothes and that clothes all went to Germany, I heard later. But very often those Polish people who worked with that clothing kept some of that clothing and traded it with the non-Jewish people through those electric fences. And they sometimes got loaf of breads and salami and stuff like that, you know. And we saw that. And I said to my sister, "I'm going to try to do that, too." But if it was going out of hand, the German guards used to start shooting with their rifles.

Q. You mean they would let it go on?

A. They would let it go until it was really going out of hand. And when it went out of hand, that's when they started shooting and shot people dead. And that

was -- then, if the commander of the camp would ask them how come those people were dead, well, they were smuggling with the non-Jewish people through the fence, or through the gates, you know. But very often I got a loaf of bread or salami.

Q. You did do it?

A. Oh, I had to. I had to. But that was before we went to the marmalade factory. Lublin, I would say Lublin and Auschwitz were the -- I been in eight -- Lublin and Auschwitz were the worst concentration camps there were. I mean the ones I had been in.

Q. Did you get enough sleep? Did you ever feel rested?

A. No. First of all, I had -- and most people had -- you had diarrhea. You had like whatever you took in, it came right out. And so during the night you get those terrible stomach cramps and you trying to go down to the toilet. It just ran down your legs because you couldn't make it to the toilet. They were outhouses with holes. And you couldn't make it in there. And a couple of our girls had been attacked by Germans, too, in those outhouses and the next day they were promptly killed.

Q. Raped and then killed?

A. Raped and killed. By the SS or the Wehrmacht or whoever took care of them. And so you never really

want to go at nighttime to those outhouses. But if you did have to go, you tried to go but you couldn't even make it. It ran right between your legs. You had no underwear. I had a thin cotton dress on, no shoes, no underwear.

Q. Barefoot? You were barefoot?

A. Barefoot. All my concentration camp years I was barefoot, you know, with the exception of eight month.

Q. How did you clean yourself up? I mean you, you didn't --

A. Oh, they gave you showers. They probably had three showers and then pushed a hundred women in there. And they said, "Take a shower." You try to get a shower with 100 women in three showers, and then was it was dribbling.

But my luck came. I would have died there, I would have died there in Lublin. But being that I volunteered, I think my luck changed. My misery changed a little bit and then helped me. When we went to that -- do we have enough of Lublin?

Q. Mm-hmmm.

A. And then after we had our soup and our bread, that's when I went to sleep.

Q. Right.

A. You see, and the next day it was the same thing again, over and over again. Always Appell. You were probably working one day and then all of a sudden that bugle would sound again. That meant it's going to be roll call again. Right in the middle of the day they would have a roll call, you know. And at Poland, the winters there it is very cold; but in the summer it is extremely hot, you know. So you stood sometimes in the boiling, boiling, sun. Now, in the mornings, only, you had naked roll call, not in the afternoon. In the afternoon, it was just see that everybody got home from work. So that was our daily work in Lublin.

So finally I volunteered to go to that -- and it was called me layer in Poland, don't ask me how to spell it but it was called Milejewo. And that was a marmalade factory. And indeed we arrived in a marmalade factory. And we got into a barrack, and there was Wehrmacht, there was no SS. It was Wehrmacht who took care of us.

Q. Describe what "Wehrmacht" is.

A. Wehrmacht is the soldiers of the army in Germany, the soldiers. They fight in the wars.

Q. Was that better than there being SS there?

A. And SS was Hitler's armies. See? So that is the difference. So we came out of Lublin from the SS,

from the storm troopers from Hitler to the Wehrmacht in Milejewo and um --

Q. German army?

A. -- German army. German army. They still had the big dogs, the big black shepherds, big dogs. They had them in Lublin, too. If you didn't work hard enough, they sent those dogs after you and they bit you in your calves and -- oh, it was awful. And so they put us in a barrack, and the next day we woke up we had roll call again. Always roll call and always music -- forgot to tell you this -- in Lublin, always music. In the morning, when you stood roll call, here came the band -- all Jewish people -- had to play music.

Oh, I have to tell you another story from Lublin, too. There is so much to be told.

Do you want just daily routine or things that went on there?

Q. I want things that went on, also.

A. Okay. Then I have to go back to Lublin.

Q. Okay. Let's go back to Lublin.

A. Lublin had a men camp and a woman camp, and then they had a concentration camp. I don't know what the concentration camp was called, but they had a name for it. And at nighttime, twice a week or three times a week, the women could go visit the men. Mind you, I was only 15

and, I mean, I was -- our way of sexual education, we didn't get what my kids get now. But, so that was unheard of for me. But women could go up there and for favors those men would give them bread and whatever they could use.

Q. The Jewish men and the Jewish women?

A. Can you believe that? Is that incredible? You see, what they were trying to do is make animals out of us. Ja, that's what they did. And the women went up there. I went up there once with them and I saw -- and when I saw what was going on, I thought, "I can't do that," you know. I mean, God, it was strictly against my upbringing, you know. But those women did and they got favors from the men.

Q. It was right there in the barracks?

A. In the barracks with the men, and they did them favors and they got bread or whatever or salami or -- Jewish people. But, anyway, that was one of them.

Then another one is that that we had in Holland -- he had just become quite famous -- a nice young Jewish man, and his voice was just delightful. And he had just become somewhat of a star. And you know how teenagers are, they're like you see them here, with all the -- you know, you dream it's your husband or you're going to have a love affair with him or something like

that. So, he was in that man's camp. And he was on a Scheissekommando. And a Scheissekommando is -- I was on it, too -- we had holes where you go to the bathroom. You see, it's not a toilet, just holes.

But that stuff has to go somewhere and they go into some kind of tin cans and you had to take those tin cans and throw it and dump it into a big tank which you pulled. They didn't have horses. You know, like those -- you see those gas trucks with those big tanks on the road? They were as big -- well, not as big, but similar to it. And instead of being a car, the Jews pulled it with string instead of horses. So you pulled that to the outside of the camp and dumped some of it.

Q. You did that?

A. I did that, too, ja. And my sister did that, too, in Lublin. Well, this particular man -- whom I forgot his name -- he always had to do that and sing in front while he was doing it with his beautiful voice. And you could always hear when he was passing by. Well, one day -- that is why I had to go to Germany for -- one day we were called. We had to stand roll call in the men's lager. It's a woman's lager.

Q. "Lager"?

A. A lager is a camp: The women's lager, the men's lager and then the concentration camp.

We had to go up to the men's lager to stand roll call. And we all marched up there, the band in front of us. There was always music playing so you could march. You had to march. You always march.

So we stood that roll call and we saw three men making a gallow. You know, poles, they were hammering and putting the poles in and making three gallows. And when they were through, they hung them in front of all of us. And that was that man with that beautiful voice and two other men.

And that's what I had to go to Germany to testify for. And here I see those German officers sitting there who gave that command to do that.

So, we stood there. We saw them being hung and then their bodies were put out on the outside of the gates of the men's lager, the men's camp. And every morning before we went to work -- we march to work -- we had to look at those bodies. These were the things what was going on in Lublin. And --

Q. Were there any rumors about why he had been hung?

A. No. Just out of pure pleasure to those Germans; the power, their sadism, pure pleasure to do that. And that we could look on and see what was happening to those Jewish people, to your own Jew. Well,

you know that the gas chambers, the ones who turned on the thing in the gas chamber were all Jewish people. Not once did the German do anything like that. So they built their own gallow. That's called a gallow, isn't it? Where you hang people on? And they had to stand on a table and Jewish men had to pull the table away. The Germans never touched it. They always let the Jews do it.

So then the bodies were hung outside the gate and then we marched every day up, I think for a good week, with music. And we had to look at those bodies hanging outside the gate until they finally, I think, buried them. So those are certain things what went on in Lublin. It was a very bad camp. Very bad camp.

Now, I go back to Milejewo now.

Q. Do you have any sense at all of how many seasons or how long you were in Lublin?

A. Ja, I think it was nine months. Nine months. Ja, because then I started -- once I came out of the camp, I started dividing because I know my age, so I started what year it was. And so I started dividing and approximately nine months I was there when I volunteered to go to Milejewo to that marmalade factory.

Q. One more question before we go to Milejewo.

Did you pray? Did you consciously think about God just getting from day to day?

A. I didn't think of nobody. Just of Debbie and secondly, my sister. That's all I thought of. Nobody, no God, no nothing, no -- just I hope I get another day through it.

Q. Were there other people you were close to there, or was it mainly you and your sister against the world?

A. No. I wasn't close to nobody. I never spoke to anybody. You could not speak in your own language. You had to speak German, so it was no use talking because if they overheard you you could get punished for it. So, I didn't even speak, no, we didn't. I wasn't friends with anybody. I don't think anybody was. It was just -- it was an animal life. You had to fight for yourself. It was later on for eight months that it was getting a little bit better, but we'll get to that.

Anyway, we went to Milejewo, we were put into a barrack and we were put into -- the next morning we got up, we had roll call. Same old situation, sunset -- no, not sunset. Sunrise up, the bugle sounded roll call, into the marmalade factory. And, indeed, that was a marmalade factory. And they made marmalade from carrots for the army in Russia. It wasn't real marmalade out of oranges. They made the jam out of carrots and we had to scrape all the carrots. Wonderful, we ate all day long, carrots, you

know. Finally we had food. So we didn't mind at all. So all you did all day long was what you had the Wehrmacht, the soldiers standing behind you and you really had to work. So we did and they got labor for free, see? But we got some carrots.

Q. Did they...

(END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2.)

(BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1.)

Q. Were they kinder, in terms discipline, than the SS?

A. Ja, they were very kind.

Q. They let you eat as you went along?

A. Ja. Ja. They were kinder. As long as you did plenty of carrots, they let you eat -- well, we couldn't even eat the carrots, really. We ate the scrapes, you know, what you scraped off. But I mean, that was pretty good. Who cares? You know, I mean, it was food. So? I ate cigarette butts. You know, the carrots tasted good to me. Very good, it was like a dessert, really. So they were pretty good. They were pretty good.

And then later on we found that they had also had a hundred men out of that Lublin there in the barrack. And they also worked in the marmalade factory, but not together with us, separated. I don't know where they worked. But we got to know of them. And we knew they had also come from Lublin. And so now and then we would see maybe one or two and just somebody would say -- through communications from other people we would find out what was going on. You know, that's like in a jail, too.

They were working also in the factory and they were brought back from Lublin. And they were quite satisfied there because they worked hard, but at least

they got some scrapes from the carrots, also. And you got your piece of bread and your bowl of soup a day, so you weren't as hungry. You weren't as hungry. It was pretty -- the same way you had four layers of bedding, two by fours, no mattresses. But you got used to that.

And one day, we woke up -- and we could always see, every morning, the men standing on roll call -- the men were not there, no men. Hmmm, that's strange. We went to the factory and we found out from the non-Jewish people who were working there that the men were transported by trucks that morning somewhere. And we thought, "Oh, Lord, they killed the whole lot. Now it's our turn." We didn't hear anything, we didn't hear anything. We kept on working.

About maybe a week later, sure enough, roll call, we were all put in a truck. And we had not only Hitler's SS taking care of us, it was Ukrainers who had volunteered into Hitler's army. And they were the worst. They were illiterates and they had those big black Labradores. And they were always in black uniform. They were called Ukrainers, from the Ukraine, from Russia and they had volunteered to work for Hitler. And they were the ones who took care of us in those trucks and in Lublin. They took care of us with the dogs and stuff. They were our watch -- like guards, they were our guards,

okay?

Now, we were sitting in one of those canvas trucks again and they kept on saying like this (indicating), we were going to get killed, those Ukrainers. We couldn't speak with them because they spoke Russian and, you know, we wouldn't speak anyway. So they kept on doing this to us, "You're all going to be killed." So we figured, well, you know, what can happen? We get killed, we get killed. I mean, there is nothing you can do.

We drove, I think, for about, oh, it must have been an hour and a half or two hours, something in that area in that truck, those 40 women. And when the truck stopped, we had to get out. "Heraus schnell, schnell." Always schnell; quick, quick. "Heraus, heraus." Quick, quick. Always it was quick, quick. And we could see the barracks, a lot of barracks. And around those barracks, around their windows, were strips of paper -- what do we use when you paint?

Q. What do you mean?

A. That you don't get the paint on the wood.

Q. Kind of tape?

A. Ja, some kind of a tape. All the windows were taped. All the doors were taped. And we thought, "Well, what's going on here?" And, "Where are we?" Well,

it was called Trawniki. And Trawniki was a ghetto that people, Jewish people lived. Where they could work, take the stuff outside to be sold. Had to be a certain time into the gates again, but, I mean, you know, it was like a ghetto. It wasn't a camp. People worked there for a living, lived in barracks. They had been taken out by the Germans into this ghetto, Jewish -- Polish-Jewish people. And they had been tailors and they made brooms and they made scrubbing brushes and stuff like that. And they took it to the outside, sold it and got money for it. And that's the way they lived.

Q. Where was it?

A. Poland. Trawniki. I don't know exactly where it is. You'll find it. Get a map and you'll find it.

And it was as quiet as a mouse in there. Not a soul. We got into a barrack and we thought, "Oh, my Lord. Now they want to kill us," because there is nobody around here. And there comes a big German officer, an SS-er. And he said, "I want you all to pick out a bed and get ready here. I want you all to pick out a bed and make it your home."

And we thought, "The hell with him. We are going to get killed anyway what are we going to do" -- oh, "Clean the barrack up and make it your home." We didn't

do it.

So about an hour later he came back -- you see, we all spoke German -- and he said, "What? This is not done yet?" And he had one of -- he always had those things where they hit --

Q. A whip?

A. A whip. And he whipped us all. He said, "Get this place cleaned up. I want you all to make this barrack up into beds," and, I mean -- anyway, we got scared and we did it. We all made our own bed, you know, and got blankets. They had -- Jewish people had lived there. The Polish Jews had lived there, so all we had to do was clean it all up and sleep there. So we did.

We were only forty people. It's a huge barrack. So we all kept very close to each other. And at around five o'clock or later on in the afternoon, they sent us some soup and a piece of bread and we got our meal. And we said, "Well, we're not going to get killed yet." I mean, "They're feeding us," you know.

About two hours later -- we all went to bed. Better go to bed. Roll call and to bed. Two hours later, we wake up and there is a smell in that barrack that's unbearable. Guess who walk in there? Those hundred men. Not a word spoken because the Germans are with them. And they march in and they go to bed. But the smell was

just -- we couldn't understand what was going on.

What we found out was that all those people who had lived in Trawniki were gassed and all their bodies were still lying in the barracks. And those men had to take all those bodies out of the barracks and burn them on top of a hill. They had cleaned our barrack out before we came, took all those bodies out. So we were sleeping in those dead bodies. And they killed -- I think there were thousands of people there -- and they killed them all -- women, men, children -- and those hundred men had to burn them. So that was the story.

Q. That was why they taped them, then.

A. They had just gassed everything, just thrown gas bombs in there and had taped it all up and were all gassed. The whole Trawniki. There wasn't a soul alive.

Now, I tell you, the next morning when we had roll call, the commander of that camp talked to us and told us that we were brought there to clean up the barracks. There was a lot of money in those barracks because people who lived here had been -- he told us the story -- then had sold their merchandise on the outside of the camp and they had sewn diamonds and money into coats and shoulder pads, because they were afraid that something would happen to them. At least they had their money with them. And we would stay alive, we would not be killed, if

we would hand them all the diamonds and the money over. Here, I was under authority again, see? And if we would not do that, we would get killed on the spot.

So, the next morning we went to work, and we had to clean all those barracks out. But in those barracks we found food, candies, canned food, milk, dried milk; all kinds of food which lasted us for eight months. I came back to my normal weight. We had a stove in our little barrack where we could cook. But as long as we gave -- and we found diamonds and money in those coats and in sweaters and in shoulder pads. And we handed them -- every night we had to hand it over to the Germans. Okay? But we got all of the food and whatever was available. We could make coffee. We could make tea. We found all kinds of things there. And I got my regular weight back again for eight months. Okay?

Well, this went on for a good six months -- five months. And one day we stood at roll call outside our barracks and we heard a lot of gun shots and a tank, a tank. Have you ever heard a tank go boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom?

We said, "What the hell is going on?" And we stood in roll call outside our barrack. They were counting us again. And we were waiting for the men to

come home. No men. All those dead bodies were taken out the barracks, they were all burned by those men. And after they were through, they were all killed. All those men were killed. All those hundred men were killed. That's what we heard, those gunshots. So then the only ones who were living there were the forty people, the forty girls who I was in the barracks with then. So, all those men were killed.

So, we knew that now any day they would come and get us. Right? Because the men were dead now, that whole Trawniki was killed out. Now the only ones who were living was the forty women of us.

Well, one woman went to the bathroom one night and hung herself. We could see her hair -- head, sticking out of the top. She hung herself. So when roll call came, they were missing her. And they told us if we don't find her we were going to get killed. So we found her. We found her hanging in the toilet. So we called the commandant -- the commander of the camp over and showed that there is where she was hanging. So that was fine.

You see, as long as we would listen to them and were under their comment -- whatever they told us to do -- they would leave us alone. We had to work, clean those barracks out. We could cook. We could go to the

showers. We lived like a normal way. At least you had enough food, you could wash yourself and you had a decent place to sleep. They moved us over into a smaller barrack once those men were killed because the barrack was just too big for us.

So they moved us over into a smaller barrack. And we had a stove in the middle of that barrack where we could do our cooking on, you know, at night and when we got home. But we -- sometimes, especially the younger girls -- I myself had to fight those Germans off, you know, because they -- it was rassen Schande, what Hitler called it, to have intercourse with a Jewish person. But they still tried it, very much so.

Q. Would they beat you or anything if you fought them off?

A. No. No. I had one woman in there who was about thirty years older than I was. And one night he came in and he said all we had to do was like this (indicating) and you stood up and you stood at attention. And he said, "Take your clothes off." And then -- Miriam was her name -- and then Miriam said -- she spoke perfect German -- she said, "Herr Obersturmbannfuhrer," or whatever his -- you had to address him what title they had. You had to know the titles. And she said, "You can't do that. She's just a child."

Q. He said that to you?

A. No. No. Miriam said that to him. "You can't take this girl. She's just a child."

He was drunk. He came drunk into the barrack and he wanted one of our women, you see, because they were taking care of us. They had no women around them. So she totally talked him out of it. But a lot of women were and they were killed as soon as they found out that the man had had intercourse with them or something like that. You know?

Q. What do you think that was about?

A. That they killed them?

Q. That they killed them as soon as they had been raped.

A. Oh, because that was -- Hitler called that a rassen Schande.

Q. All right. Okay.

A. Race shame.

Q. Right. Okay.

A. None of his people could go with another race.

Q. Right.

A. You know, this was -- that had to be killed immediately, that had to be forgotten. She could never speak to nobody that she had had intercourse with Hitler's

Q. He said that to you?

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A. You know, this was -- that had to be killed immediately, that had to be forgotten. She could never speak to nobody that she had had intercourse with Hitler's

police. You see, she was a witness.

Q. Were there women who you think got raped and got away with it?

A. I don't know. I really don't know. The only one I really know, there were two of them in the first camp I was in and they were both taken away the next morning. And all they did was they went to the bathroom at nighttime. See? But they were waiting for them, and they found out, I mean --

So, this was every day, regular day of working there. We even had some little gardens where we grew vegetables. They let us grow vegetables.

Q. Did the slightly improved conditions lead you to reach out more to the other women besides your sister?

A. Ja. A little bit more, not much because we could not communicate too well. We had a lot of Polish people in there who stuck very close to each other. Well, we got into a couple of fights. I have one scar still. One broke a mirror on top of my nose because I looked in her mirror. You see, they were very short tempered, especially the older ones, you know. And we had a couple of escapes, the Polish people, they kept the diamonds and they escaped.

Q. Successfully?

A. Ja. Couple of them escaped. They didn't do

anything to us, though. I mean, the commander of this particular camp was under the SS, but he was -- some of them were human beings. He still was strict and there was discipline, but he knew what another human was. He recognized human beings.

Q. So he didn't think of Jews as non-humans?

A. No. No.

Q. As sub-humans?

A. No. No. I mean, at least he had a little bit of heart, you know. So the only thing is what he told us once when he was drunk was that he had chosen this particular job because he had two choices: To go to the front to fight the Russians or to look after the Jews. And he took to look after the Jews because he will not fight the Russians. They were scared to death of the Russians. So, we were there for about eight months then, and, you know, we could start hearing planes flying over. The Russians were coming closer.

Q. Did you know that? Did you know that that's what it was?

A. No, not directly. How far are we? You still have a lot?

Q. We're fine.

A. Not directly did we know then that the Russians were coming, but we could see on the commander

and on the other SS men that they were getting kind of nervous. We also had Ukrainers looking after us there, too, you know. I think there was always two guards for one woman or for one person. Plenty of people there to make sure that you didn't escape and stuff like that. And we could not -- you could feel it that there was something going on. And sure enough, one day we stood roll call and they put us into a truck and they told us that the work was done. We didn't have to work here anymore. Everything was taken care of, all the barracks were cleaned out -- which was not so because we had not cleaned all the barracks out yet. But our job was done. We were going to go somewhere else again to clean up. And they sent us back to Lublin.

(Interruption.)

Q. We need you to come a little closer to the mike.

A. Sorry about that.

Q. That's okay.

A. Where were we, now?

Q. Coming out of the marmalade factory and being taken back to Lublin. That's where we stopped.

A. Oh, no. No, no. The marmalade factory was over.

Q. Oh, yes.

A. Well, they put us in those trucks again and they didn't -- oh, ja, they didn't want to tell us where they were going to take us, just that we were going to go to a place where we were going to clean up again. And when we came in, we recognized the camp. It was Lublin.

There were a few people around. It was mostly political prisoners, not many Jewish people. That was in a matter of not quite a year, then, that we noticed not hardly any Jewish people, a lot of political prisoners. And we could not talk to them. They were mostly Russians and Polish people. And we got the same treatment, again, what we had before. Not as severe as we had to stand naked on roll call, but here we went again with no hygiene and bowl soup and piece of bread a day, and hardly any work left.

They made work for us, you know. I mean, there was hardly anything to do and there weren't as many guards there and there weren't as many people. I don't even know if they really had still a concentration camp there. We were in that labor camp again, that lager.

So, we worked there for about six weeks. I don't remember what we did, if we worked or what particular type of work we did, but it was the same routine what we had before: Getting up in the morning, roll call, work, and your soup, and, you know, all the

same thing. The only exception is that we did not stand naked at roll call no more.

Q. But you were hungry again and everything was --

A. Hungry again. Same things start all over again.

Q. Was it the same bizarre brutality?

A. No. We don't see the Ukrainers there. It wasn't -- Ukrainers were the worst in brutality, the Ukrainers with their dogs. No, it wasn't as bad anymore. I don't know if -- I really don't remember. I mean, it wasn't that bad. But we tried to get information out of the political prisoners and we couldn't. They wouldn't give us a chance to talk. We had a feeling that the war was ending because those prisoners wouldn't talk to us. We had a feeling because we could hear the planes again. We had a feeling it was coming near. But would they kill us or not, we didn't know.

One morning we got up and the commander came out and he said that we were going to have to walk to another camp because they had no more trucks or trains available. So we had to get our belongings, whatever we had, you know, your little thing -- another thing was what they didn't do. The clothes we came in with from that other camp, you know, that Trawniki. I had pretty good

clothes on because we had found so much. I had nice boots on and a coat with a fur collar and I was decently dressed. They did not take that away from us. We could keep those clothes.

So, there wasn't that much of an authority there anymore, it was just that you went to sleep in those barracks and you got up and you got your food, and that's all. But they didn't care what you were wearing, what you were not wearing. You were not searched on or anything like that. So, he told us to go and get our belongings, which we did. We got our coats, and I had a bandana around my head and he said, "We're going to walk."

Well, they walked us for seven days and seven nights. And half of the people really died, literally, on the road. My feet -- well, you start peeling off your clothes -- my feet were so raw. I'd taken my shoes off and my stockings off, I mean, you hardly wore anything no more.

Q. What month was it?

A. January.

A. Wait a minute and I'll go back to that. No, see? January? No, it couldn't have been January. It was June because I was liberated in January. June, July, August, September -- it must have been either the end of May or June.

Q. Right, because you were taking off your clothes because it was hot.

A. Hot. That's it.

Q. So how long had you been in Lublin the second time before you walked?

A. Four weeks, four to six weeks, give or take a few days. Around four to six weeks, not very long. And we walked with those political prisoners. And they put us overnight in little places, though, to sleep. And one place I remember, which was torture, it was over some kind of a brick place where they fired bricks. And on top of that, up in the attic, that's where we sleep. They had little light bulbs on the floor where the heat came through from those ovens and we would walk on that and burn our feet. And it was just awful.

And they put us in the most ridiculous places. I think they wanted to kill us off, but the political prisoners didn't give them a chance. They didn't let them, you see, because they used to separate us. They used to say, "The Polish and the Russians over here, the Jews over there." The Polish and the Russians wouldn't go for it. They would come with us.

Q. Really?

A. Ja, ja. They really saved our lives. I don't know how anti-Semetic they were, but they would say,

"Definitely not. You are not going to kill those people. We are going to stay with them."

Q. Really?

A. Yes. They stayed with us.

Q. What was the ratio of political prisoners to Jews?

A. What do you mean?

Q. How many were there in comparison to -- were there more or less?

A. Yes, much more.

Q. Much more.

A. Much more. Much more political prisoners than we were because when we came there there were hardly any Jews in Lublin. We were the only Jews who came there, the forty out of that Trawniki who had cleaned that place up. So those political prisoners must have been 100, 150 at least, you know. And they took care of us. I think they saved our lives because they were trying to kill us on the road because they had a lot of marches, the Germans. And they killed everybody on the road.

But a lot of those prisoners couldn't make that walk because they walked us seven days and seven nights, literally. They gave us an hour and then they gave us a couple of hours to sleep. Well, in the end, the German had killed the dogs because the dogs couldn't make

it no more. They were walking bare feet.

Q. Really?

A. Ja, ja, they were walking with us. And they gave up. And they finally got us a train. I don't know where they got it from, but they got us a train. Now, the whole thing later on, we found out, was the Russians were so close to us. They were right behind us. All the military equipment was withdrawn. They had no trains. They had no trucks. They had no soldiers and they didn't want to get caught with the Russians. So they kept us walking. But they couldn't find anything to transport us in because it was all gone, you see?

Q. So the German soldiers had been left high and dry by their own government, right?

A. I mean, they had to take care of those political prisoners --

Q. Right.

A. -- and of us. So they got -- they probably got -- and they told them to walk somewhere to get out of the Russians' way, which they did, indeed. And finally we got a train, a freight train. It was the first freight train I had ever been in. And they stuffed us into the freight train and I don't know how many days and nights we rode in that. But that is when I came to Auschwitz. That was my last eight months of concentration camp.

And later on, after I had testified in Germany, the judge felt very sorry for me because I could have taken one of my kids with me to Germany because it was very uncomfortable sitting in that courtroom with all those Nazis sitting there. And he came with me and we had a cup of coffee in the hotel. And he didn't say very much because he spoke only German, but one thing he said to me he said, "When your group arrived in the political prisoners and the forty" -- because they have records of everything, they have records -- "when you arrived in Auschwitz, you were supposed to go to the gas chambers." He said, "You were supposed to be scheduled for the gas chambers, but some miracle," he said, "you didn't get the gas." That's what he said to me. They knew. They have records of everything. Amazing? Ja.

I should have asked them some more questions, but I was so happy to get out of there. Oh, the anti-Semitism is so big still there. It is unbelievable. I'll tell you that later.

And we came there, and we arrived there and they gave us a shower and they gave us the prison clothes. We couldn't keep our own clothes. We had hardly anything on. And my sister --

Q. Was it as empty, was it as Lublin had been?

A. No. Auschwitz was full with barracks. Full,

men and women.

Q. Same barracks? Men and women in the same barracks?

A. No, no, separate camps. The first thing I got was my number. I didn't have a number for all those years. In Auschwitz I got my number, when you got clothes, whatever clothes they gave you and you were stuffed into a barrack again. And here I became on the Scheissekommando again, doing the -- you know, putting it in the tank, way outside the camp you took that. And you always had to sing and the band was always playing, and it was awful.

My sister became very sick. I pulled her out -- well, I had a friend of mine I met there who was a doctor of profession, but she didn't practice there. And she recognized that my sister had typhus and her hair was falling out and stuff like that. And she told me, she said, "If they put her in a hospital, Debbie, they'll kill her. They'll kill her." She said, "I have to get her out."

And she got her out and hid her somewhere and don't ask me where. I don't know what she did with her. I don't know. I never saw my sister again after that. My sister was gone because she did go into a hospital. But that doctor promised me that she would do something. I

never knew her name, and my sister was gone.

That was the first time I was separated from my sister when I was working on the Scheissekommando. And then later on they took me away from that and they made me weave ropes. And you had to go so many meters a day otherwise you got slashes instead. So your hands were absolutely raw from -- you had to, like, braid ropes for the army, real hard rope, you know. You had to braid it, yards and yards and yards every day.

Q. You had to work really fast?

A. Really fast, yes. Otherwise you got lashes at nighttime. You had a quota. And if you didn't do that, I mean, they gave you lashes for that. I became sick, too, I got -- well, it's mountain KLOWS (phonetic), here. It's a disease you get -- abscesses in your mouth and in your throat. And you can't eat and you can't swallow anymore. It's a disease which horses used to get before they used to get injections. It's a very bad disease, and it's very contageous and you really die from that. I also had -- I still have it on my legs -- huge holes in my legs. You see, in the camp the women did not get their period because of malnutrition, and I also think that they put some stuff in your soup so that you wouldn't get it.

Q. Really?

A. Ja. Because I think that would have been an awful mess. But I -- that stuff used to come out of those holes of mine. The dirt used to come all out. I was an absolute mess in Auschwitz. I mean, I think my body gave up. It couldn't take it no longer. I was lucky I was not put in an experimental camp because I know people who were put in that. That was even worse, but nevertheless I went in to a hospital.

(End of Tape 2, Side 1.)

(Tape 2, Side 2.)

Q. You saw your sister in the hospital?

A. Ja. I met my sister in the hospital again and there was very, very ill. Now, even in hospitals they had roll calls.

Q. Wait. When you went into the hospital, did you think that was a dangerous thing to do or did you just -- it was so bad you had no recourse?

A. No, no. I had to. I had to lie down. I couldn't go on no more. I was really dying. And my sister was in very bad condition. We both were dying. But they still had roll call every morning, every day. And how was that now? My sister told me that doctor had hidden her under her -- in her bed or somehow that when they had roll call, they only counted for one. So my sister was not there. So that's the way she kept my sister going, or something like that.

Q. To somehow not be counted?

A. Not to be counted, right.

Q. So she could stay in bed.

A. So she could -- ja. I don't know exactly how that went. I never -- my sister won't talk about it. She won't talk about it. Doesn't want to hear anything about it. And, well, my sister and I, we stayed in that hospital and we just waited to die. That's all.

And then one day a woman ran into the barracks and she said, "You know what? There isn't a guard in the camp. The gates are all wide open. I don't know what's going on, but there isn't a soul outside."

Now, they had taken -- they had marched all the healthy people out of the camp that night, which we didn't know because we were in a hospital. They had marched them all out and shot them outside on the roads and they had put time bombs around our barracks, which we went out of immediately because we didn't trust them. So we tried to get all the sick people out -- and we did -- and we sat in the snow. And I think we waited outside our barracks for about six days and the Russians walked in. Ja, so we were liberated by the Russians, just the sick people. All the healthy people were marched out and shot on the road.

Q. Dying saved your life.

A. Ja. The dying saved my life. We were both so sick. And I was very sick in Russia, too. I was in a hospital, I think, for four weeks there in Russia once they liberated me. You know, I was really sick and so was my sister. But then the dying really -- we both checked into the hospital and we both made it.

But I tell you, for instance, little things that happened in Auschwitz. Always the band was playing,

you know, always. And there was one girl who was playing in the band and got to have an affair with one of those SS men. And they were caught. And, you know, that they were -- one day we had a roll call and they were both brought in and both hung in front of us, the SS-er and her, the Jewish woman who had an affair with the SS man. They were both hung in front of us. They hanged them. So this is the things that still went on in Auschwitz which, all together, I was two years in the camp.

Q. Two years you were in Auschwitz?

A. No, no, no, no, no. Two years -- oh, God, I never could have last two years. You couldn't last two years in Auschwitz. I was there nine months and I was dying. I was absolutely dying there, so was my sister. It was the worst.

Q. You wanted to -- maybe what we could --

(Tape turned off.)

Q. Let's go eat now.

A. Now, ask me a question. I don't know where I am.

Q. Well, you were just at the point of liberation, of having been in the hospital and everybody else was taken out and shot but you were there and then you left because of the time bomb. And you waited for six days.

A. It was in January. We figured out it must have been January because the snow was there. The year we really didn't know. The year we didn't know. We figured it was around January. It was around 1945 or 1944. We were in and out of barracks. One barrack blew up. The other ones did not blow up. So we could go in and out of the barracks, but we still didn't trust it because we were frightened. They had time bombs around our barracks also and -- oh, I have to tell you another thing. I have to make a note of that. It's very important.

And so we waited. Some of the girls went in to where the Germans had their food and found some, not much, some canned food and stuff. There wasn't much foods left. Apparently, they were running out, too. And whatever they could find, we shared from the people who were left there. And we ate -- as water, there was no water because everything was frozen over. We ate the snow and we survived. We survived until the Russians came in.

And, boy, were we happy to see those Russians come marching in. Let me tell you. We were happy to see those guys. They got us meat. They started feeding us. I think we were there for about ten days and they fed us and they made us a little bit comfortable until they could arrange -- they didn't know who we were. And they arranged transportation for us.

We first had -- I think it was horse and wagons they put us in first and then they transferred us to trains. And we went through Czechoslovakia into Odessa on the Black Sea in Russia and we were put in a camp again. But at least we knew there were no chimneys where we could smell the flesh. And they put us in a camp because we are like prisoners of war, of course, to them. The war was still on. We found out, it was 1944; January, 1944. So indeed, in the time that we had met, had seen that trouble in Lublin --

(Interruption.)

A. I told you about that we could sense some trouble in Trawniki, and stuff like that, and in Lublin that was then when they already had gone into France.

Q. They had already liberated France?

A. Right. They had liberated France, you see. So we knew -- we could feel that there had been some kind of trouble with the war or something was going wrong. So that's what we found out, then, in Odessa, that it was 1944 January.

We were fed by the Red Cross, English Red Cross. We got packages from the Red Cross, very nice. There was porridge in there and chocolate and cigarettes and -- very nice packages. And also the Russians fed us a bowl of soup a day or something like that.

Q. Just a quick question. The Russian men, did they treat you any differently? Were there any rapes?

A. No.

Q. You know, were they more respectful?

A. Yes, because the camp actually was very much into the city. It wasn't -- they were just guards, I would say, that took care of us. And it was in the city of Odessa itself. During the day we had freedom going to the beach. We could play in the sand and in the water. They actually warned us not to go into water because of mines. During the day we could go into the city, but with the guards. For instance, I had a tooth removed there because I had such a toothache. And so I went to the hospital there and they removed a tooth of mine and the guards went with me and then they brought you back to the camp. You know?

The food was pretty good. You didn't do anything there. You got -- they did bring in showers and stuff like that, portable showers for us to bathe. And we had lice. They took all care of that, you know, because we were terribly undernourished and completely neglected. You can imagine what we looked like, you know, like skeletons. And they treated us very good, I would say. I mean, very good. I mean, no problem at all. And I think we were in Odessa from January to the end of April.

Q. Did people stare at you on the street at all because you were so --

A. No. No. We didn't go out in the street very much. I didn't get too much freedom on the street. If you walked on the street, I don't think they mind -- they're not used to seeing guards, I think, walking around there. I didn't pay attention to that at all. I just wanted to get rid of my toothache. But I washed -- when I was liberated from Auschwitz, I was in the hospital in Odessa for about two weeks with a terrible bladder infection and I've suffered with that ever since. I have chronic bladder infections all the time. When I was so sick in Russia, nothing but blood came out. So they gave me pills and they kept me in the hospital there and I got better, you know?

So then after those months that we were there, we were put onto a ship and sent back to Europe. That was in April, 1945. And we all had to go through examinations. They examined you. And then they gave you clothes to put on and then they sprayed all kinds of disinfectant on you and then you went on the ship and they sent you back to Europe. Now, while we were undressing -- everybody had to get undressed -- they found a lot of SS hidden in Odessa.

Q. Really?

A. From the Auschwitz people who had -- the people from Auschwitz who they had liberated. Some of those SS had hidden and they have put the old clothes on, like the men and they found them. You see, the SS was there, too, under their toes. They were hidden.

Q. So they were trying to pass as Jewish inmates --

A. Ja, ja.

Q. -- to be saved.

A. Ja. Ja. But they were caught and I don't know what happened to them. But they were caught and that's why we had to get undressed. And they checked you all over, you know --

Q. Did you witness that?

A. No, but we heard about that. But we didn't witness that, but we heard about that. And then we went aboard ship and we came into France, into Marseilles, in France --

Q. How long was the ship ride, just a day or --

A. I think it was ten days, ten days, somewhere in that area. And the war had just been over because it was in May. And we arrived in Marseilles and we arrived in a big hall. And there were a lot of people sitting there -- now, here is what I come to. And there were a lot of Jewish people sitting there who would greet you and

ask you where you were from and so on and interviewed you.

And the first thing they wanted to know is if you wanted to go to Israel. And now, my sister and I, that's all we needed to hear. No way. No way. We didn't wanted to go to no Israel. We didn't want anything to do with Jewish no more. We were completely -- we were liberated. We were back in France. We went through hell. We didn't want anything to do with it anymore. So we went ourselves, we went to Holland.

We looked high and low for our relatives; nobody left. I had one aunt left who had gone underground, hidden by non-Jewish people during the war. Her husband died of cancer while he was hidden and she and her daughter came out. And those were the only two what I had left from a huge, huge family in Holland. So I don't really have many relatives left, you know.

So, we went to Amsterdam, my sister and I, and we stayed with some friends of ours. And while we were staying there, my sister became very sick and had tuberculosis. That was left over from the camp. And she went into a sanitarium for two years because we didn't have antibiotics at that time. So -- or any treatment for tuberculosis. The only way they could treat it was by rest and good food. So she was for two years in a

hospital. And I kept on buying her good food and stuff like that because I had to go to Belgium to get the food; Holland had no food. And --

Q. Is tuberculosis catching?

A. Ja.

Q. Did you see your sister?

A. Ja, I worked in the hospital, too. I wanted to be with her. And, ja, it's catching. And I worked with her and I worked there for time being. And then when she became better, I left and I did other kind of work, you know. And when she came out, we had a little bit of money and I sent her through school to learn how to manicure and pedicure, so at least when she felt up to par that she could make a living. Which we did. I worked in a shoe store and she did the manicure and the pedicure.

We lived in an apartment. And then one day we said, "You know, Holland hasn't been that good to us. Let's get out of here." So we went to England, not speaking a word of English. And we lived in England for five years and I put in for to come to the United States. And I had to wait five years for my quota. That was five years. I had to wait five years to get in here. And she got married and I came to the United States by myself.

And I was very unhappy in the beginning because my sister was back there. She got married there,

you know, that was all I had. But then I met my husband with his two boys, and he married me and we had a good life together for thirteen years and then he died.

Q. Those were his boys --

A. His children.

Q. -- from a first marriage?

A. Ja, he was a widower when I met him. They was three and five years old.

Q. What happened when you came to the United States? Were Jewish agencies helpful in that or did you do that all on your own steam?

A. Did all on my own.

Q. What year did you finally come to --

A. 1954.

Q. How long did you --

A. Now, I have -- I tell you the truth and, I mean, you really shouldn't put that on the tape.

(Tape turned off.)

A. I don't know if I should put that on the tape. Ja, for me, one very -- I forgot to mention this about Lublin.

Q. Okay.

A. That my sister and I left Lublin and when we were in Trawniki, when we were cleaning up those barracks, the Russians were coming already much closer and the

Germans were getting very nervous. They -- that whole camp of Lublin, they dug mass graves, the Jews, and they shot every single person into those graves.

Q. While you were in Trawniki?

A. They were all killed.

Q. Thousands.

A. Thousands. All in mass graves. In mass -- oh, it wasn't either. I think it was -- I think we were still in Milejewo. That was while we were in the marmalade factory we heard about it. We had just escaped and they killed the whole lot. They killed every single person in there.

Q. Gee.

A. Ja. And you know how they did that? I don't know if you've ever seen that. It's a big -- it's like a hole in the ground about a mile long. And they have those people lining up all in a row. Like that, and the guns are over there and then when they shoot them they fall into the mass grave. That's the way they do it. And then they put the dirt on top of them. All of Lublin was shot. All in mass graves. Right after we left. I think we were gone maybe two months. They shot them all.

Q. When you heard something like that, did you just steal yourself against emotion or did you --

A. No. You had no emotion left. You were as

hard as a nail. Didn't bother me at all to take my clothes off in front of a man. It was hard -- it's surprising that I have a soft spot left in my heart. It didn't bother you. So they were killed. We were going to get killed, too. That was your attitude. So they went a week before we did.

Q. So was the feeling that you just tried as hard as you could to survive and then you would be killed and that was it?

A. Well, you don't give up. I think this is actually the Jewish heritage we have. You don't give up. I mean, a very few people -- lots of people did, electrocuted themselves. They went through the electric wires, you know. They electrocuted themselves. But most people, really, we were fighters, you know. I think the Jewish people really are fighters. It is inhabited in us. But --

Q. Did it ever occur to you to give up or to commit suicide, or did you ever contemplate suicide?

A. Never. Never. Never ever. I always believed in God. I always believed in a God. I always said God will be with us. And, indeed, it was, you know. But, like I said, my fortune was the way I was raised. I wasn't raised like a Jewish princess, let's face it. I was raised, really, with an iron hand. I was lucky that I

had volunteered to go into a certain place to do in -- a marmalade factory because two months later that whole Lublin was shot. I escaped that. I had volunteered to go from Sobibor to Lublin. I volunteered for that. The only place that I really was completely desperate and knew I was going to die was Auschwitz.

Q. And that was when you were liberated.

A. That's when I was liberated.

Q. It's incredible.

A. And that's the only place I felt that both of us was going to die, my sister and I.

Q. And you just felt resigned about that; there was nothing you could --

A. Nothing you could do. You just take it. You just take it, like life. Just took it. I mean, what could you do? You know, except every morning if we woke up and all the guards and everything was gone, then hope started getting into you again. I don't think you felt that sick anymore, you know. I mean, all of a sudden hope came in.

Q. Did you let yourself fully hope or were you still very cautious and wary?

A. I was cautious and wary under the Russians; oh, yes. I was very cautious and wary of the Russians. But they treated us very nice, very nice. I don't really

think they knew what to do with it. And yet they say that a lot of us could be dead -- they liberated quite a few camps, you know. They could have a lot of Jewish people over there. And I was lucky to get out of there, too. But the war was still on when they shipped us out. We were the prisoners of war. You see, they shipped us out by the end of April and the war was over, I believe, while we were on the ocean on May 10th, or something like that, in 1945. That's when the war was declared over.

Q. So what happened to Jews who were still in Russia after the war? They were kept there?

A. Sure. I bet you. I bet you.

Q. How long were you in England?

A. Five years.

Q. Five years.

A. Had to wait for my quota to come here to the United States. I had to find myself a sponsor, which I found. My girl friend Linda, you know, the one who was in the concentration -- in the camp -- not in the camp, in that orphanage with me -- she lives in Los Angeles. And she had a doctor and she said he would sponsor us. So he sponsored my sister and me.

Q. But then your sister didn't come, though?

A. My sister didn't come and that was very funny because I never went to bother the man. I figured it

was nice of him to sponsor me. So when I got married, my husband and I, we honeymooned in Mexico (sic) in La Jolla. I said, "Let's go and let's give that sponsor of mine a call," you know.

So when I introduced myself. I introduced myself as Deborah Komprah (phonetic) because he didn't know me by my maiden names -- by my married name, Sessler.

"Oh," he said, "it's so nice to hear from you. Come and have Sunday brunch with me."

And I say, "What time?"

And he said, "Eleven o'clock."

"Wonderful."

But I didn't tell him I was married. Now, he was a bachelor. And he was hoping he would catch one of the two Dutch girls.

Q. Was he Dutch?

A. No. He was American, an orthopedic surgeon. And he loved Linda, my girl friend. And he said, "Where can I meet a nice Dutch woman like you?"

She said, "I've got two for you in England." This is the way it went. Is that funny?

Q. That's why he sponsored you?

A. (Laughter.) That's why he sponsored us. And he really -- you know, a sponsor has to give all his income tax information and the government has to know a

lot about him.

So anyway, I rang the doorbell and here he opens the door and he says, "Who is that?"

And I said, "That's my husband." And that man nearly fainted. Then he said, "Where is your sister?"

I said, "She got married in England."

Q. Poor old guy. That's so funny.

A. But I still am in contact with him. So now and then I'll let him know how I'm doing. He did get married. He was much older than I was, God. When I was, what, when I came here, 28? And he was -- I think he must have been around 55. But he was hoping he would get one of us, you know. So that was funny, wasn't it? Once in a while and now and then I call him up and tell him how -- he's still alive.

Q. Where did you come to when you came to the U.S.?

A. Well, that's a good question. I went to New York and I stayed in Hotel Chesterfield. God, what a flea place that was. But anyway, I had $100 in my pocket. That was all you could take out of England is $100, or I could take into the United States, let me put it that way. And I think in two days I was through my $100. Boy, that went like that.

So I knew of a girl, of a woman, who actually was a associated years ago with that orphanage. And she had been in the United States, oh, since 1945. And I knew she worked for a family in San Francisco and I called her. And I said, "Kitty, I don't know what to do," blah, blah, blah, blah. I had $100 in my pocket.

"Don't worry. Mrs. Senton will take care of you." So, Mrs. Senton told me to go to United Airlines --

Who was Mrs. Senton? The woman she worked for?

A. Ja, Robert Senton's wife. He is got very much to do with the Jewish Bulletin, too.

-- "go to United Airlines, there is ticket for you there and she'll help you come over to San Francisco. And then we'll find a job for you and you can pay her back."

And, indeed, that's what we did. So I stayed --

Q. "We?"

A. Well, me. I did. And she, Mrs. Senton, took me into her house for a couple of weeks until I found a job. And then I found myself a place on Page Street -- you're too young to remember that, but 300 Page Street had a home for -- it used to be only for Jewish immigrant girls. But now they took everybody in like Japanese and

Orientals and anybody who was single and had no place to live. And I paid $52 a month, it was 1954. $52 a month and --

Q. Page and what? Near -- what was the cross street? What was the street that ran in the other direction?

A. I don't remember.

Q. Fairly near downtown probably?

A. Ja. About three blocks up from Market Street, ja.

And $52 and I got two meals a day and my room, which I shared with another girl, you know. And six weeks later I met my husband through -- I went to a Hadassah meeting. Somebody talked me in to come to a Hadassah meeting. And there was another lady there who knew of my husband. So she invited me for dinner and I met my husband there, see?

Q. You didn't know he was your husband yet, did you?

A. No. We had a big round table and I started fiddling -- "Hmm, he's single. I wonder who he belongs to?" You know? (Laughter.) And sure enough, after dinner we all sat in the living room and he came and sat with me on the couch. And he told me he was a widower, he had two small children and he showed the kids to me. And

then, you see, I had come by bus, by street cars, so, you see, he asked me if he could drive me home.

Well, a man with a car, you know. I mean, we're not used to that in Europe. So that was wonderful. So he drove me home. We date -- we started dating.

Q. What was he like? What was your first impression?

A. What was my first impression of my husband? Smart. I like a man who talks smart. He was smart, you know. He really was. He wasn't that good looking, but he was lovely to talk to. Somebody who could carry on a conversation, you know what I mean? And now we started going out together. And then slowly we took the kids with us.

And on one day we sat in the car and the kids were in the back seat and Eddie tapped me on my shoulder -- they called me Debbie -- he was three and Jeffrey was five -- and he said, "Debbie, are you Jewish?"

And I said, "Yes, Eddie, I am."

He said, "Well, why don't you marry my father? He's looking for a Jewish girl." (Laughter.)

Q. How old was he?

A. Three.

Q. Okay.

A. He said, "Why don't you marry my father? He's looking for Jewish girl."

So about a week later or two weeks later Martin picked me up from work. I worked for Christian of Copenhagen at that time in Union Square. And he picked me up and we went for a cup of coffee. And he had a little box in his pocket. And he said, "Eddie told me to do this." And it was my engagement ring.

Q. "Eddie told me."

A. Ja, "Eddie told me to marry you." He said, "That's your engagement ring." So then he said, "I want to go buy a house and I want you to go look around for a house or would you rather work?" He had a house in the Sunset -- "or would you rather live there and go for a nice honeymoon to Hawaii or would you like a new home and we go to Mexico for a honeymoon?"

I said, "I'd rather have a new home."

So we bought -- I bought this. I picked this out. And he asked me if I liked it and, of course, it was -- can you imagine? It was like a castle to me, the palace -- if I would like this house. So, I says, "Sure, love it."

So he said, "Well, let's buy it."

We bought it. And then, we got married in November -- I met him in May, we got married in November,

and in December the kids and I moved in here. And I think the night after my honeymoon I was pregnant with my daughter. The first night of my honeymoon I was pregnant with Elizabeth. We got married November 20th and she was born November 21st -- August 21st, nine months later.

Q. How did you -- you hadn't been around men that much in your life?

A. No.

Q. Did you feel at all uncomfortable with him or it was just like --

A. No, I think what actually drew me to Cort was the kids. Isn't that strange? I think -- maybe it was going back to my life being without a mother. You know, very often I've thought of that because I think that drew me.

Q. Two little boys.

A. Two little boys without a mother. You see, and I think unconsciously that must have been in my mind from those kids of no mother.

Q. And they were the same -- almost the same age as when --

A. Same age.

Q. -- your mother had died.

A. Ja.

Q. Just a year --

A. And my mother died when I was four.

Q. -- year -- you were four and your sister was two.

A. Two.

Q. And they were three and five?

A. Oh, no, they were one and three when the mother died. He was already two years a widower. But nevertheless, the idea that those two kids had no mother. I, you know, very often I've thought of that, maybe that the kids really drew me -- you know, I always told him, "I never loved you, I only loved your kids," you know, kidding him. But I think that had a lot to do with it.

Q. Was he good with the kids?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. So that probably also was attractive, you know, a man who was kind with his children, that's something, really.

A. You know, let me tell you something, my husband worked in the city for Mr. and Mrs. -- well, he was a rep. He repped dresses and suits and stuff like that. And Mr. and Mrs. Sable. And they had a box in Candlestick for the Giants. And every Saturday afternoon my husband used to go with my daughter to the Giants game. In the winter he used to take the guys to soccer for the HAR-KO-WER (phonetic) and in the summer he took

Elizabeth on Saturday afternoon to the baseball game.

Do you know, since my husband is dead that my daughter has not gone to a baseball game? She will not go. She will not go. I have letters from her when we sent her to camp. That she writes in the letters, "When are we going to the baseball game again, Daddy?" How much she looked forward to that, see? So, and there it was taken away from her.

And she was very mean to me in the beginning because she made me feel like it was my fault that her father died. She was awfully fond of him and he was very fond of her, being the opposite sex, I think. So like I said, that the worst time in my life.

Q. She was 13?

A. Liz was eleven when my husband died. He's 17 years dead. She's 29 now. 18 years in December he'll be dead, ja. So you see -- so that to me -- to me that was the worst of my life, was my husband passing away. I mean, you know, I really -- I was young, you know, -- and I didn't want nobody to interfere with my children. I wanted to, you know, I wanted to just do it all by myself.

His last words on his death bed were, "Be good to the children." You know? And I didn't wanted no men to interfere. I was much younger, I could have

probably find men, but I wanted no men to interfere with me. I want to raise my own kids and get them through college. That's what he wanted; that's what his dream was. And it was my dream, too, because my education was interrupted. I had to learn out of books and what I hear from other people and go to lectures and this is the way I...

-- (End of tape encountered.)

(End of Tape 2, Side 2.)

(Tape 3, Side 1.)

Q. How did you do it? Did they have to have scholarships and financial aid?

A. No, when my husband died, it was just before Chanuka. Oh, it was awful. I just bought all the gifts and we made such a big to do for Chanuka. I had, always, my whole house here decorated.

See, here I didn't want have anything to do with Jewish anymore, but all of a sudden it came all back to me. I had my mirror always decorated, "Happy Chanuka" and lights around it and I had manorah and all my kids had menorahs, you know. I mean, everything was so festive and here he died. And here I had my whole house decorated. Well, I told the kids we have to have a meeting, you know. After the funeral was over, I think a week after that and I said, "You know what? We have to have a meeting." So we all sat around the table.

Q. Now, how old were the kids at that point?

A. Elizabeth was eleven. Jeffrey -- Eddie, my youngest, son was sixteen, and my oldest one was eighteen.

Q. Okay. So you sat here?

A. We sat around the table here, on the table we are sitting here. And I said, "Kids, we have to be absolutely very frank now." They didn't want to hear

about it. But I had to talk about it.

And I told them, I said, "Look, Daddy is gone. I'm all by myself. We're going to live on our Social Security. The little bit of money Daddy left to me is of no use to any of us. I keep that in a bank for a rainy day. You kids have to go to college and the only way we can do it is work together and do it. You all have to work yourself through college. And this home and this refrigerator and whatever is in this home belongs to the four of us. Whenever you kids want to live at home, eat at home, wash at home, sleep at home, whatever you want to do at home, you do what you want. It's just as much as it is mine. But what you do with the college is up to you. I cannot help you. You can take your money from Social Security, if I can afford to give it to you because I had to live off it. You can have that. But I will have to find, eventually, find myself a job to make ends meet, you know." And indeed, they all worked.

My -- both my boys were vendors at Candlestick park at 49-er games, like that. And Elizabeth did all kinds of jobs. She worked in banks and A & W and Mc Donald's and you name it. But they all worked themselves through college. No scholarships.

Q. Where did they go?

A. They all graduated from San Jose State. And

then my oldest son took halfway of his Master's through San Francisco State. But that's when the professor told him to go and look for that job, you know. So, they all graduated from San Jose State, and they all have a degree.

Q. That's great.

A. Ja, I think I did a pretty good job.

Q. They've fulfilled your dreams.

A. Ja, well, my husband's dream. That's what he always wanted, that the kids would have a good education and that I would be good to them and I was, I think. To my best of knowledge, I was.

Q. What's interesting was that you had grown up with such an authoritarian structure and that act of sitting down with your kids and saying, "Look, we're all a team," is such a departure from that.

A. Well, I could have no authority over them. I didn't have the power. I didn't have the money. I mean, we just had to work on it together. We just didn't have it. I didn't have it. I couldn't show them more power or more authority because we were all in the same boat. I have just as much -- they got the $200 Social Security, I have got $200 Social Security. That's all we had. You know, because I still had kids under 18 years old. I drew Social Security. The minute your kids became 18 years old

you don't get Social Security any more.

Q. Because they were supposed to support -- I mean, is that the thinking? Is that the reason, because it's expected that they can --

A. They can take care of themselves, ja, ja. No, look, I can -- by the time your kid is 18 years old, you can go out and work. I can go and take care of myself. You see, the kids can take care -- that Social Security they haven't changed it much -- much more radical now than what it used to be. Which is fair. I mean, they helped me to where my kids were able to go to college, and then they can find themselves a job, I can find myself a job, you know. You can start work and earning your own money, you know? So what this is the way we had to do. We just had to talk about it. And they understood and the funny thing is -- I have to tell you this, this is very important.

Now, I told you my son became very sick with Hotchkin's disease last year and, I mean, it was very hard to talk about it, you see. And then he had me on the phone one day and he said, "Mom, if ever anything happens to me, I have to be very frank with you, my son and my wife never need to worry the rest of their lives."

I said, "Eddie, what an awful thing to say."

And he said, "Well, I will never (Crying)

have my wife or my child go through what you had to go through. So," he said, "we all saw it and we all made up our minds that once we get married the first thing we're going to do is take care that if, God forbid, anything happens to us that our spouses and our children are taken care of."

And he said, "I can guarantee you, Mom, she'll be rich. Rich, rich." He said, "That's all the money I put into life insurance now, so, I don't want to see -- ever see what you had to go through."

So this was, you know -- so I have pretty nice family. This is much more sentimental to me than all that stuff. (Sobbing) I mean, that's all is a long time ago, too, you know. This is all so new now, with my son, and -- but many times I could have given up.

Q. Do you want me to get you a Kleenex?

A. No, no I'll dry up.

Q. You'll dry up. (Laughing.)

A. Many times I could have given up, you know, but I think I love life too much. I saw death too close. I saw it too close to me. I saw the gas chambers. I saw the smoke going up in the chimneys. I smell that, flesh, still where the awful charcoal smell of flesh early in the morning when you woke up those chimneys were already smoking, you know. So I've seen death so close to me that

I have to wake up in the morning with a smile on my face and thank the good Lord I'm alive. You know? So that's my story.

It's quite a story isn't it?

Q. You're not kidding.

A. Ja.

Q. That's the understatement of the year, huh?

A. Ja. But a lot of families have problems you know. But, like I said, I never talk about it. It's very good to get it out. It really is. There's a lot of -- I mean I'm a different person since I spoke at those high schools because --

Q. Was it pretty much the same story, the same --

A. Ja.

Q. -- things?

A. Ja. Very similar to what I've told you. You see, a personal story because I could not go into the political side. I don't know. I -- the only thing is sometimes in the camp I thought, "Well, why would they kill us off, put us in gas chambers, have the chimneys going and then you can go to the doctor and tell him you have a headache and he gives you an aspirin? Or go to the dentist and have your tooth filled and the next day you're standing on roll call and they can take you to the gas

chamber. Now, what is the logic or the political side of what is it?" You know?

And then I always wondered -- and he might be a very great man -- why Roosevelt and the Pope never could do anything for us. You see? And people knew there were concentration camps. They knew there were concentration camps. And I'm sure that Roosevelt and the Pope knew that and that nothing was being done for us. That is one thing, you know, and here you want to come to the United States because it was such a wonderful country, you know, and -- I don't know. We're just not liked. We're just not liked, that's all there is to it.

Q. Have you experienced any anti-Semitism in this country?

A. Ja. Oh, have I. Lots here, I experienced it. I was with girls at work, oh, I shouldn't have put her name in the tape.

Q. Whatever you want.

A. I should get a Kleenex.

I worked with girls at Bullock's and we were friends like this, like so. But I could always feel that for some reason I wasn't invited to parties or I wasn't invited to their dinners because I was Jewish. I always had that feeling. And I've told them so, and then they said, "Oh no, it's not so." But I know for a fact it is

so.

Q. You said, "I don't think I'm invited because I'm Jewish?"

A. Oh, yes, I told one of them that.

Q. Really?

A. Sure. That's the only reason.

Q. And she said "Oh, no, no, no"?

A. No. No, they won't admit it, but I know it is. They belong to that club that Jews weren't allowed, country club in Chris -- what is that golf club called in San Francisco? There's a golf club there.

Q. Are Jews still not allowed there?

A. No. No. She's taken me there, once. But I felt pretty uncomfortable. It's funny. It's funny, I felt uncomfortable there because I knew I wasn't liked there. You see? And I mean being Jewish, very unfortunately to say, but I think it's all the way through the Bible -- we suffer. We suffer. But being that we are such strong people, we fight on. We don't give up. The race will never die. The race will never die because the Jews are fighters. They won't give up.

Q. It's funny, you know, there's almost two parallel things that have gone through this story and one is that you really put it behind you in a lot of ways, but another is an incredible pride in your people.

A. Oh, definitely. Oh, definitely. Oh, I've got pride in the Jewish people. Oh, absolutely. Because they're fighters. When I was at this that Masada -- oh, let me tell you, I never wanted to go to Israel. Never. I didn't want to have anything to do with any religion, with any Jewish religion. I never wanted to go to Israel until I got there two years ago. Now I want to go back.

When I was standing on that Masada -- I don't know if you've ever been there -- what went through my mind -- now, this is just -- I could have stand there for days. I could have stood there for days and just looked and sat there and thinking what those people went through. Because it is similar being actually what I went through, you know. They saw death right in front of them, you know. So it made a tremendous impression on me. Jerusalem made a tremendous impression on me. Not only on the Jewish side, on the side where Jesus supposedly was born and crucified made a tremendous impression on me, too, I had to really pinch my arms, was I really in Israel? You see?

So, now I wanted to go back. That's the funny thing. But that isn't really that I am against -- the Jewish people and Israel itself. What I was against was -- as a child, what had been -- I was brainwashed. I was brainwashed. And I think religion is a brainwash.

It's a brainwashing. They brainwashed me. I couldn't look at a Christmas tree. I couldn't go into a store and buy candies. I couldn't talk to a non-Jew person; they were no good. But I know of people who are still very bigoted, you know. They really are. And the reason is because, unfortunately to say, this is the way they were raised. Nobody was good except the Jew. You know, this is the way they were raised and that's the way I was raised, too. And I'm telling you the truth, I have absolutely rebelled against it. And I am -- because like I told you, my kids could never say the word n[redacted]r in my house or make a slang word of a Japanese or a Chinese person. Everybody who's a human being is a human being, regardless of what color skin, what religion they have.

So I rebel against this so that they drilled it all into me. And I, as a little girl, thought, "God, what a good Jewish girl I am. Never any harm will happen to me because, boy, I have been really good." Well, it sure went sour. It wasn't. You know? So this is what way it went against me right after the war.

And when I lived in England, like I lived right next door to a synagogue. I had a lovely apartment. I could hear them. Friday night I could hear them singing, on Shabbes morgan I could hear them singing. I never put one foot into that synagogue. I

didn't want anything to do with it. And to this day my sister doesn't want anything to do with it.

I changed because my husband has three children and I think things come back. It's wonderful to have the Jewish life. It's wonderful. Jewish family is very nice. But I will never drill my kids into what I have learned as a child. It was a terrible shock, you know. Anything into the extreme is no good, you see. And this is what I have been taught, into the extreme. And it was awful to realize that -- well, I'd been so good and here look what I'm punished for. I'm punished for it. You know? So, do you have any more questions?

Q. I wanted to know what it was like to go to the trials.

A. Oh, very hard, very hard. My first trial was, let's see, I was at Bullock's six years, maybe nine years ago, my first trial. And I had to testify -- what was the first one I testified for? The second one I testified against Lublin about that fellow who had been hung and the first one I was testifying --

Q. The singer?

A. The singer. I had to testify for -- I forgot what I had to go to the first one for. But it will come back to me.

They paid, through Scandanavian Airlines,

they paid you your fare, okay. Why they picked Scandanavian Airlines, I don't know, but you couldn't fly with anybody else but Scandanavian Airlines. Germans did that. And I arrived in Copenhagen, I stayed one night, and then I flew to Hamburg. And they paid for all your expenses. You just keep all your receipts for the time that you're on trial. You keep all your receipts.

And I was -- I took a taxi from the airport to the hotel what they told me to check into. And I had an awful little room, a cold, miserable, but I took it. You see? Stupid. This is the way I was taught. I've always been taught that way. Don't fight back. Don't be assertive. Don't do anything. Just take it. So I sat in that room freezing at nighttime. And I went to the trial. I was picked up by a taxi. I took a taxi you go to the trial. In other words, a man who picked me up, I think. And I was there for two days. And then as soon as I was through there, I take the plane and I flew to England. You see, I wanted to get out of there as fast as possible. And I don't know what I went the first one, which camp I had to testify for, the first camp -- the first time. But the second time -- I went two years later. And I didn't want to go no more. And that's when I got a letter from the Jewish World Congress or World Jewish Congress. What is it? Which one is it?

Q. I think -- I'm not sure. I thought it was World Jewish Congress?

A. Ja. Well, anyway, they send me a letter that in the name of justice I've got to go and testify. So I went.

Well, I check in that same hotel again. And I said, "Well, Debbie, you're not going to take that any more." It was freezing cold October. Hamburg is an extremely cold city. It's in the northern part, the North Seas. It's a very cold city. And sure enough, she shows me the room again with that --

Q. Same room?

A. Well, similar room; not exactly, but a similar room. And I went downstairs and I said, "Excuse me, please. I'm from California and I'm used to a lot of heat. I cannot stand that room. There is no heat even. There's no television. There's no radio. I cannot" --

"That's all we have."

So she said, "By the way, here is a letter for you." So she gave me the letter and, you know, it said in English if I had any problem to come to the Jewish Center. If I have any problems to come, please come and tell them. And it was two blocks away, I found out. So I thought, "You know what, Debbie? That's exactly what you're going to do."

So I took and put my coat on -- it was freezing -- and I walked two blocks and went to the Jewish Center. I don't know, I forgot his name, Mr. Stein or something like that. I got to see him and I explained to him what was going on and that I had a cold room and that they wouldn't give me another room. He said, "Well, why didn't you bring anybody with you? You shouldn't have come alone here. You could have brought your daughter or your son."

Well, I didn't know that. He said, "So it's easier to go to the" -- he said that, "We'll take care of you. Please don't worry about it. We have a concert tomorrow night here from some people from Israel and we want you to come." Blah, blah, blah. "We'll pick you up," and so on. He was very nice.

So I went out of there a little lighter. Somebody was helping me, you know. So I came to the hotel and there was another girl sitting. And I thought, "Hmm, I'll try it again." So I walked up to the receptionist and I said, "Listen, I'm in room such-and-such, but it's so cold there I can't stand it. Would you please have at least for a couple of hours so I could watch television in a nice warm room for me?"

"Oh sure," she said. And she gives me a room. Now, I walk into that room -- It's warm, there is a

beautiful television, there is a desk where I can write some letters on. Lovely. So I thought -- I can't say that word -- "The hell with you people." I took my suitcases out of that ice cold room and I brought them all myself out and I stuck them in that room. And I said, "Now, you go and try and get me out of here." Was I right?

Q. You were great.

A. I said, "Now, you try to get me out of here." So, I'm sitting in that room and I'm watching television -- it's not in English; it's all in German -- so I was bored anyway because I didn't understand it very well, and the telephone rang. There's a gentleman downstairs to see me.

So I went downstairs and he stands and he said, "I am with the Jewish Federation or the Jewish Center," whatever, "and Mr. Stein had told me that you were very dissatisfied here and would please tell me the circumstances."

So I told him and I told him, then, what I had done. He said, "Just a minute, please." So he walked over to the receptionist. He comes back and he said, "You stay in that room. I just told her," he said. "And if anything goes wrong, you just come and see us," he said, "Don't take anything from them." He said, "You are

supposed to be make comfortable here."

I said, "Well," -- I told him that last time I sat in ice cold room. "Ja," he said. Well, last time they were not established there yet. You know? So what he said, "Tomorrow night there's somebody coming here to pick you up to take you to the synagogue and to the" -- you know.

So they arranged all the days for me and they were very nice to me, and I had that nice warm room. See? But you see, they still -- they knew why I was there for, you see. They know that I'm there to testify against Nazis and they still make you uncomfortable. It's awful. The same with the airport. There is something against Germans or any German product or any kind of Germany which goes against me. You know? Which is understanding, isn't it? Ja. So...

Q. So, in the trials was it hard for you? Was it very stressful?

A. Yes. You see those Nazis sitting there and --

Q. Did you remember them at all?

A. No. They look -- you know, don't forget, when I was there, I was 15 years old. And those men were probably, what? 28, 29, 30 years old. They looked like old men to me then. So I imagine what they looked now. I

mean --

Q. Decades later.

A. Boy, little old men. And they were sitting there and laughing and, oh, it was awful. Just awful.

Q. Was there anybody to lean on, anybody to be understanding to you? Any Jewish people?

A. No. I had a translator. They asked me if I had a translator or I wanted translator. So it was a translator sitting next to me. You see, all they really wanted to know: Exactly what happened with that singer and how far I was away from it and --

Q. Very factual?

A. Ja. You see, these were not the criminal cases. These were civil cases. These people did things in camps which they had authority to do by Hitler, but they did things of their own which they had no authority to do. And this is what they were on trial for. I never found out if they got jail sentence or nothing. They don't tell you a word. They just say "thank you" and they pay you for your expense and that's all there is to it. You know, that's all. Ja.

Q. So are you glad you went or do you feel like if they asked you all over again you wouldn't go?

A. I don't think I'm going anymore. Never ever. Never. I shouldn't have done it in the first

place. But the Jewish Congress got after me and they got a big letter in the name of justice I have to go and testify. You know?

I was called here ten years ago, or 15 years ago, I was called here in San Francisco to the German Consulate. And there is where they first interviewed me, you see. Because the German Consul are supposed to be in German grounds, then. That's where they first interviewed me and they said would I be willing to testify in Germany in case they needed me. And I said, "Oh, I guess I would." You see, and that's why they called me, you see. But I would never do it again. Never. It was awful. It wasn't very pleasant, no, not to see those men sitting there. And you don't even know whether they got a sentence or not, you know. And yet they had murdered so many people. Yes, it's awful. Ja.

Q. Is there -- how are we doing on tape. We're fine on tape.

Is there anything that I didn't ask you that you feel ought to be recorded, any particular story or insight that you've had since then or --

A. No, I think we've covered it. I think I've covered it pretty good. Every day, of course, little incidents happened, but I really and truly it's how many years ago now, 40? 42 years ago, so that's a long time.

I mean, you can see that the picture is still with me. You know, not that I have dreams anymore. I had a lot of dreams after. Years and years and years that I dreamt every night. In sweats, I woke up.

Q. And you didn't tell your husband? It was while you were married to your husband?

A. No, no.

Q. He didn't know about that?

A. No. Years it took before I really -- the only thing is what I do have to say on here now -- when I applied for this pension from Holland, I applied for pension because they said I was eligible to to get a pension because I had some sickness left over or I, indeed, have my legs are very bad. I still have bladder infections, my back is getting better now, but for a long time my back was very bad. I was sent by the Dutch government to a doctor here in St. Mary's Hospital. And the doctor they sent me to I think was a Nazi. He had me crying and screaming in that room so loud --

Q. Pain?

A. No, because the way he interrogated me. I was crying. He was doubting my story while I had my number on my arm. And this was from the Dutch government out. And this is one thing I'll never forget. And there's sitting two receptionist in the front room and

they never came in to find out what was wrong with me. And here I was just sitting, screaming and crying, telling him the story. He was doubting me -- that I was telling the story right and why should I get a pension?

Q. Really?

A. Ja. It's on my word of honor. I forgot the man's name. But he was here in St. Mary's Halberson (phonetic). It's a clinic now. They changed the name of it to --

Q. Was he German?

A. I think, ja. He had a German accent. I think he was a Nazi. I think so, he had a German accent. And he was special picked for the people who were in -- how do you call that? -- Who came in -- who were going to get the pension from the Dutch government. They had to go through him first and he had to say yes or no if you had a sickness left over.

Q. Well, do you think that was the Dutch government arranging that or --

A. Ja. Because the Dutch government is the ones who give the pensions. It's not the Germans who give the pensions. It's the Dutch. But they found a doctor, apparently, who probably is against Jews, see, so that he wouldn't give pension. It was going by his say that they wouldn't give pensions to everybody. I bet you that's --

oh, God, my neighbor was so mad when I came home she said, "I told you I wanted to go with you. You should have never gone alone."

Oh, that man interrogated me so badly. And he had it all in front of him and he knew exactly, on paper.

Q. So he was doubting that your story was true?

A. Ja, he was doubting me. And, I mean, really telling me, "Why do you think you did that?" I mean, "Why do you think that happened?" I mean, really interrogating me while all I had to do -- all he had to do was examine me.

Q. How old -- how long had you been married at that point?

A. I was a widow.

Q. You were a widow already.

A. I was a widow. Ja, ja. Oh, my husband would have never let me go. My husband would have never let me testify in Germany, I could never see any movie with any Nazi on it. Books, I couldn't read about Nazis, he would never allow me. Oh, no. That's why Cort never wanted to hear my story, either. Never, I couldn't.

Q. It was too painful for him to hear it.

A. Too painful to hear what I went through. And he always told me, "Don't ever have that number taken care

of. You wear this with pride. You're proud of that number. Don't have it taken care of." A lot of people had that taken out, you know. He said, "You wear that for the rest of your life. You die with it, you get buried with it."

Q. Had his family suffered from the holocaust?

A. I think his parents were killed in Austria and his father -- his brother -- him and his brother came out. His brother lives in New York and Cort lived here in San Francisco.

Q. Had Cort been in any camps or anything?

A. No. '37. He went into the -- he was called into the Army then in 1942.

Q. Would you have told him about it if he had been able to hear it or would you have not wanted to --

A. I don't think I would want to hurt him. I think I would have hurt him.

Q. Yes, to know that you had been in such pain?

A. Ja, ja. You see, the time that I started talking about it was after Cort died because to me his death was much more tragic to me. Usually one tragic takes over from the other one, you see. That was a much, much more tragic event than me going through concentration camp.

Q. And so that became something easier to talk

about, it wasn't so horrible compared to your husband's death?

A. Ja. Ja. To me my husband's death was awful. Being left alone with three children, you know, and no money you know, that was -- at least I have a roof over my house for the rest of my life, you know. But -- he didn't think of dying that soon. You know? So that was rough, it was rough. Ja, that was a very hard time in my life, very hard. Losing a person who had given me a lot of love, which I had never had in my life, you know. Finally, I got a little bit of love from a person.

Every morning he brought me my coffee in bed. For 13 years, he brought me my coffee in bed. I could not get up with the children for breakfast. Now, you try and find a man like -- he adored he kissed the ground I walked on. You know? But he didn't leave me provided for the rest. But I had 13 wonderful years with him. You know? So, I can't be too upset, you know. A lot of people can't even say that, you know. At least I had 13 nice years. You know, a beautiful daughter by him whom I love very much. That's all I have in my life, my daughter; and then now my sons and my grandsons, my grandchildren. But my true blood is, of course, my daughter.

Q. And your sister.

A. And my sister.

(End of tape 3, side 1 encountered.

Tape 3, side 2 is blank.)