

1 INTERVIEW WITH: Edith Mayer

2 INTERVIEWER: Joan Billsey

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5 TRANSCRIBER: Lisa Collman

6 I was born in Holland

7 in 1927 and the Germans invaded Holland in 1940. At that
8 time we had lived in Rotterdam and my father was killed
9 immediately through the German bombs on May 10th, 1940. I
10 was left with my mother and our life changed actually
11 immediately. My mother was born in Germany and since we
12 had quite a large family over there we were very much
13 involved from the beginning of 1933 in their new life-style
14 which really happened from the very beginning.

15 The only thing, like most German Jews, nobody could
16 have ever believed the extent of what would happen even-
17 tually because they all said, this is something which will
18 pass and it will be over in three months or in six months.
19 I mean, nobody ever could just imagine what eventually would
20 happen.

21 We had an opportunity quite often--my father had
22 relatives in South America and Argentina--but to leave your
23 home or the place where you had been born is not an easy
24 thing to do and, therefore, many people pushed themselves
25 out of the way. But, like I said, in 1940 as soon as

1 Hitler invaded Holland, we had to reenter Jewish soil and
2 very shortly afterward all Jewish schools--I went to a
3 Jewish school, I would almost call it a yeshiva-type
4 school--was closed and as a Jewish child or as a Jewish
5 adult you had--you were limited in doing just about any-
6 thing. You couldn't use (inaudible) bus, you couldn't
7 use a movie, you couldn't go anyplace. There was a curfew--
8 I don't remember anymore whether it was 8:30 or 9:00, or
9 maybe even earlier. And things got gradually worse and
10 in August 1942, my mother and myself we were picked up by
11 the German Gestapo and brought to a concentration camp in
12 Holland which was called Westerbork. I have two older
13 brothers; they had already been interned previously.

14 And it's--to go back now that we have watched on
15 television, for instance, or many things, "The Rise and Fall
16 of the Third Reich", which I had read before, and the
17 "Winds of War", how very disciplined the European Jew was,
18 the western European Jew. We were told--I don't remember
19 by who, maybe it was a Jewish organization--that the nazis
20 will pick you up and there was a little suitcase ready
21 behind the door at all times and with a little knapsack
22 because there were certain measurements given to you and
23 which was ready that they would pick you up.

24 And just one day they knocked on the door and this is
25 exactly how you left. You left your house and you left

1 all your belongings and the little things which you really
2 loved to have you took with you. I spent a little over two
3 years in Westerbork which was bad enough but not too bad.
4 From there every week thousands of people left for the
5 east and we worked there. The food was not good, was not--
6 but it was--you--actually you did not die of hunger there.
7 And we had showers, public showers which could be used--
8 I don't remember anymore where the towels and soap came
9 from, but it was available there.

10 Q How old were you?

11 A I was born in 1927, so then I--in 1943, I--wait a
12 minute, we came--no, we came in--in August--you know, like
13 I said before, you try very, very hard to put this behind
14 you and you forget. Otherwise, you wouldn't be able to
15 survive this and I have been very fortunate in doing this
16 at times. Like small details, absolutely gone into the
17 background which is a very good thing. I also, when my
18 children were small, I tried--my daughter used to ask me,
19 why doesn't she have grandparents. I tried to push this
20 away. Details they're only told or spoken about is when
21 they were actually teenagers that they could actually deal
22 with this because we wanted--we felt--my husband did not
23 go through the Holocaust, he came in 1927 to America--but
24 we felt we didn't want them to know. And now if you would
25 ask me how I came from the town in Holland to Westerbork,

1 I really don't recall this anymore. But I do recall that
2 we got off at a small place, it was called (Voch-ha-len)
3 and that we walked--it was in August, it was hot--and since
4 we knew we were going to the east, we had very heavy
5 clothes made from a tailor, like a suit which was triple-
6 layer, it was very, very heavy, and very heavy work shoes.
7 And then I remember the walking about of an hour, maybe,
8 or maybe even longer. But certain details, it's a good
9 thing, you just forget.

10 We left for Theresienstadt, which is in Czechoslovakia,
11 by cattle car, which was a very, very bad experience. You
12 see, now that I talk to you I'm happy that I can do it
13 without crying or getting too emotional. I had days where
14 I am so depressed that I can't even face anybody and yet
15 days I can just go over it, you see, and this is very hard
16 to explain. For, this coming here to a gathering like that
17 is a very emotional dismal experience, you know. And you
18 have to really learn, like I said before, to live with it.
19 I get a little bit from one to the other, but I think you--
20 you'll understand anyway.

21 So when we came--that was a ride in a cattle car and
22 I have no idea whether this took three days or eight days--
23 I couldn't even tell you because it was very crowded, it
24 was awful to--and I remember this because there were old
25 and young, and pregnant women, and there was a pail on the

1 side where people eliminated--it is awful, just awful.

2 Q Who were you with? Who was--

3 A It was--no, when I went there, I was--my mother had
4 gone before--I was with close friends and with my oldest
5 brother, he went with me there.

6 Q Did you stay with them in the camp (inaudible)

7 A He went right--he went to Auschwitz--he went to
8 Auschwitz in September--in September '44, and my mother
9 went to Auschwitz--that was in October '44. She actually
10 went with the last transport which had left Theresienstadt;
11 after this there were no more. And at that time, I was hit
12 by Eichmann because I went up to him. Eichmann was in
13 charge of this camp, and had asked him--I wanted to go with
14 my mother and that is when he hit me. Of course, today
15 I could almost say "thank you" to him because if I--if he
16 would have given me permission to go with her to Auschwitz
17 I would have gone with her right into the gas chamber.

18 I do know from people who came back that she didn't
19 have a chance. My mother was at that time forty-nine years
20 old and she just didn't have a chance because there was
21 (inaudible) you know. And by that time she looked very--
22 very thin and had gum sore a lot already so she had no
23 chance. Anyway--

24 Q Did you work in the camp?

25 A Yes.

1 Q What kind of work did you do?

2 A At first I worked--for the time being, I was working
3 outside in a field like where there was a lot of potatoes,
4 and from Gentile farmers there's who me-chiz-ed us. So we
5 could take these potatoes, you know--that was in Holland.
6 Later I worked in the laundry room where I learned to do
7 shirts for the SS. That's why my husband always says he
8 has the nicest shirts in town, because I'm a really exper-
9 ienced laundress. But to come back to this, at that time
10 I don't know whether I knew how to hold an iron and there are
11 always older women who were very eager to help you; and you
12 do learn, you know, if you have to you do learn.

13 Q Can you--can you tell me, did you take any personal
14 risks yourself?

15 A What do you mean "personal"? Listen, everybody took
16 a personal risk. (Inaudible) You had to do actually--you
17 had to--the best thing was always--you know, you become
18 very street-smart in a situation like that, to remain in a
19 group, to do nothing which is outstanding and you do
20 nothing which is not allowed, you know, to go always in the
21 middle with the crowd. And then you learn this and you
22 learn this very fast, you know, to do--like I said, in
23 Holland it was bad, but it was--it was bad, yes, because it
24 was cold and there was no heat, and it was hot and there
25 was no different clothes. But at least we still had our

1 own shoes and we had our own few things we were allowed to
2 be taken along.

3 Q What kind of relationships did you have in the camp
4 with--did you remain friendly with the people that you came
5 with, or did you form new relationships?

6 A You mean in the camp?

7 Q Yes.

8 A No, we--there were some close friends I had at that
9 time, but after the war I don't think--I personally did not
10 keep up any great friendships, no.

11 Q But this group that you--you stayed with a group.

12 A Yes, we lived as a group. Now, some of them--many of
13 these in my particular group, they did not come back
14 because, you know, that was also a matter of luck. Of
15 course, I always say when you were young you had a much
16 better chance because you were able to take more, more
17 abuse, I could say, you know. When we arrived, for instance,
18 in Theresienstadt, we were told to leave just everything
19 what we had--by that time, our belongings, they were what
20 you could take in one case, you understand. But you--you--
21 it was important to you. Maybe I still have saved a piece
22 of soap and maybe a small towel and a comb and a brush or
23 something like this. And whatever we took along was taken
24 from us, absolutely nothing. We had the clothes on our
25 backs. It was not much but it was--it was clean, that I

1 remember. And there things got pretty bad before we got a
2 meal cups where you got in the morning a little bit
3 coffee, you got a piece of bread which I would almost say
4 might be like three fingers worth but that would last for
5 three days. And I was forever hungry and I ate this right
6 away. There was nothing left for the two days. Lunchtime
7 I don't even remember too much when we came home from work.
8 I worked in a factory which was outside the ghetto and this
9 was--we had separated--we called it glimmer, but it is
10 really like a formica. It was as thick as--maybe two
11 inches thick and it had to be with a sharp knife and on a
12 wooden plate, you had to separate this, split this. And it
13 became paper thin, like this. It's supposed to be for
14 insulation in airplanes and you use it in iron. But later
15 on we were told that--that never left the ghetto. I really
16 don't know whether this is true.

17 But anyway these conditions to work there were pretty
18 bad. We had shifts maybe from started at 4:00 in the
19 morning and nine hours later you were brought back to your
20 barrack. And then I don't even know whether--whether we
21 had a bowl or a little kettle where you got a little water
22 soup with--always caraway seeds because the camp was
23 located in Czechoslovakia and I understand the Czechs, they
24 cook a lot with caraway seeds; that's why I hate them today
25 because each time I would eat a piece of my bread I only

1 see a caraway seed--it was thick with them, because
2 everything was--it was (inaudible)

3 Q What about--was there any kind of form of entertain-
4 ment in the camp, anything--

5 A There was in Westerbork, they had something there.
6 Every so often they put a show on which was for the Red
7 Cross or for the outside world. For instance, I remember
8 in Theresienstadt they kept about, maybe forty, fifty
9 children for show in there; and the (o-ber-stan) fuhrer,
10 which was the commandant of the camp, he was--his name was
11 Rahm; and the children, they were small, they could probably
12 not even remember that they had ever had ice cream or--
13 and they were dressed for this particular meeting in front
14 of the Swiss Red Cross, I want you to know. And then they
15 said, "Come on, children, now we get you ice cream," and
16 the children said, "Oh, no, not ice cream again." They were
17 trying to do this and the Red Cross just fell for this,
18 you know.

19 The only people I remember who got packages in--in
20 Theresienstadt were the Danish Jews. They got--from the
21 Danish Red Cross they got food packages. And why they
22 were able to get this and from other countries, but I was
23 never able to see.

24 And I was there ten months, until the Russians came
25 and liberated us. And these ten months, they were like ten

1 years. Altogether three years.

2 Q Where did you go when you were liberated?

3 A That was a very slow trip back to Holland. First we
4 went to Prague, from Prague to Pilsen, and from Pilsen to
5 a small town which was called Falcon-dor in Holland. That
6 again took weeks because there was no transportation, there
7 was no--no--no (inaudible) In the meantime, right after
8 the war, I had known that my oldest brother was alive. He
9 came back from Auschwitz and I had heard that somebody had
10 seen him in Prague. I did not know where my younger
11 brother was but, in turn, he had heard in Holland on the
12 radio from the Red Cross that I was alive. But they knew
13 that my mother was not alive. So we're together. It was
14 (inaudible)

15 Q Can I ask you something: Was there a difference in
16 surviving between men and women? Did you have--was there
17 something more that men had to do or less that they had to
18 do?

19 A I don't know whether they had to--it depended entirely
20 on the camp and entirely on the place. For instance, in
21 Theresienstadt where I was, they had something there which
22 was klein-of-fes-trum. That was as high--nobody ever could
23 stand there; you could just bend there or lay there.
24 People--if you got in there you never came out alive, no.
25 And more men got into there than women, you know. I don't

1 know because when I look around me here and then I was in
2 Israel and saw the survivors these are today all men and
3 women who are between fifty-five and sixty-five, so you can
4 figure out their ages, you see. They were all young. And
5 like I say, you know there are some humane people in every
6 situation. The--my brother who was in Auschwitz, he did
7 some outside work and there was a farmer who lived--was
8 near Auschwitz but this man could have easily gotten killed.
9 And I believe he was Polish and they always say the Poles are
10 very anti-Semitic; they say they are worse than the
11 Germans were. And this man threw my brother every so often
12 a newspaper there and there was something in there, either
13 a piece of bread or a piece of salami. I mean, this was
14 extremely dangerous, you know. There were always some
15 people.

16 I had a cousin who was in Auschwitz and he became the
17 cook for some of these big shots over there. So that
18 enabled him to eat, (inaudible) and these things made you
19 survive this, you see. These make you survive this, these
20 little things which you did, you know. For instance, when
21 I was in Theresienstadt, there were these Danish people
22 that got packages and through somebody, through a girl I
23 knew from school way back, there was a young man who gave
24 out his shirts for washing and ironing and this is how I got
25 some extra food, from this thing. I actually did know him

1 through the girl I got these work for him. This enabled me
2 to get, maybe, I don't remember, maybe an apple or maybe
3 an egg or maybe a piece of bread, but something for food,
4 something for food.

5 Q Was there any kind of resistant groups in your camp?

6 A No, I'm sorry to say not. I say this always and now.
7 For instance, the people in the Warsaw ghetto, there were--
8 they did rise up and do you--the best European Jew, I think
9 they identified much more like the Germans with the Germans
10 and the--they're a very obedient people and a very disci-
11 plined people. They're being told to go straight and they
12 do go straight, and they go being told to go right they do
13 go right. I am positive if some of them got a chance to
14 kill somebody, they did if they got a chance. I had seen,
15 for instance, after the war that German and Czech Jews let
16 pregnant women from these guards to women, you know, there
17 German women who were there. They were pregnant, run naked
18 and really beat them something awful which I thought was
19 awful, but it was a sort of a revenge, you know. And I
20 hated even--I couldn't even see this. I didn't want to see
21 this either because it was an eye for an eye which I don't
22 think is right, you understand. But this is what was done,
23 and--

24 Q After the war did you feel revengeful? Did you feel--
25 I mean, what did you do with--

1 A It took me--oh, it took us twenty-five years, twenty
2 years to go back to the place where I was born and to--
3 was able to go to my grandparents' grave and at first I
4 felt--I don't know whether I felt hate but I felt bitterness,
5 you know, because I had lost both parents--they were not
6 even fifty years old. But I don't know revenge. I always
7 say God takes care of these things and eventually they will
8 because we--it was funny that you asked me. We were asked--
9 just some time ago we went to a lecture to the synagogue
10 in New York, it's called Hab-o-nim, and there was --the
11 lecture, the subject was "Did the Germans atone for their
12 Jews?" and the answer was, no, that they're here completely
13 free on account they do give them restitution money, you
14 see.

15 On the other hand, from experience I felt the associa-
16 tion I had with Germans in New York and these European
17 gentile people that they do feel guilty about it. But I
18 cannot make a new generation responsible for that, you
19 know. So, just recently--you see, it's a sort of punish-
20 ment by watching and reading about this. Right now I'm
21 reading "War and Remembrance" which is (inaudible) book,
22 which is very difficult for me to read. And somebody said
23 to me this is fiction. It is not; it is ninety percent
24 history and ten percent fiction because the man must have
25 done an awful lot of research on it. He has the words and

1 the capability to put it into words what I cannot, you
2 understand. It is not--but just recently they had eight
3 weeks on television about years of darkness. Did you watch
4 this by any chance? It was very, very interesting. It
5 started with Poland and I never knew that the Jews in Poland
6 had such a highly cultured intellectual life because I
7 always thought that the Jews in Poland--most of them lived
8 in small towns which they called shtetl, you know. But it
9 was not. They were very much involved, they showed
10 universities and it was just awful.

11 But the Polish gentile, they were trained to move on to
12 anti-Semitic, you see. They were--most of them, a lot of
13 formative people and there was not like today communication.
14 There were no newspapers and no radio and no television.
15 So people believed what they were told. If the church told
16 them the Jews killed our God, they believed this, the
17 majority of the people did; and this is where it--where it
18 all started. And, believe me, Jesus Christ didn't mean
19 that when He fought for what was right and wrong.

20 Q How do your children feel about the Holocaust?

21 A My children, I see--my children are very active in the
22 Antidefamation League and our daughter works for ABC. She
23 called this morning and she said I should have been there
24 with you. But somehow she didn't. They are both involved,
25 but I don't want them to be as involved in it, see. For

1 instance, our daughter has more difficulties to deal with
2 and she's reading a book right now that's called "Children
3 of the Holocaust". It was like amended, and she says she
4 has a lot of difficulties now. I didn't want this to
5 happen forty years after that she should suffer, you see.
6 But, I don't know, they're going this summer like last year
7 to Fire Island, not together, but both of them, and I said,
8 gee, I would have liked you to go to Europe. So the answer
9 was, she said, I will never set foot on German soil, you
10 know. But I don't want them to hate, I don't, you see,
11 because to come back to this eight-week program about years
12 of darkness, it started with the Polish Jews. There was a
13 small town in Germany; they had, I think, fifty-two Jewish
14 families and about sixty Catholic families, no Protestants.
15 And the people over there were interviewed, there were all
16 old today, you see. And they said, yes, and the neighbors--
17 and they were one day taken away and they burned the
18 synagogue and they destroyed the library and all the Jews
19 books got--the writers and--but it was--they didn't ask
20 questions. Of course, I must say on account Hitler was not
21 stopped in the beginning--later it was much too late--they
22 couldn't have stopped anymore. One was afraid of the
23 other. Children--parents were afraid of their own children,
24 you know, see, because they were indoctrinated in school or
25 in wherever, in organizations. They had to do what the

1 fuhrer told them. And then they--this photographer and he's
2 German who came from this small town where the people were
3 interviewed but in the next generation he was a young man,
4 came to New York and interviewed their people here--most
5 of them live in Washington Heights--and he interviewed these
6 people. And, of course, they came from the small town,
7 they knew each other by name; it was very interesting story.
8 And how they said what happened, their side of the story,
9 how they were being picked up and left everything behind,
10 and how they--many of them got killed and put into concen-
11 tration camps. These were the people who came here, maybe,
12 I would almost say before 1939 or 1940; after 1940 you
13 couldn't even get out anymore. And as soon as Hitler
14 marched into Poland, you couldn't walk out anymore.

15 But the end story was they didn't know, this--they did
16 not know. And I always say it was impossible to have such
17 an organization which was executed to--to such an extreme
18 this extermination and with shooting and killing, and--and--
19 that nobody knew, you know. I mean, after all, six million
20 people--six million Jews got killed. They're saying ten
21 million people because I knew Catholic sisters and there
22 were Gypsies and there were priests and there--listen, the--
23 Konrad Adenauer, who was the head of the German government,
24 he was in a concentration camp. Just anybody who did not
25 agree with them got put away, you know. There was no

1 freedom. That's what is so important here. I always tell
2 my children how important it is to have our freedom of
3 speech and freedom of the press, you know, because--I mean,
4 this is taking a very--this is dangerous, you know. All
5 young people have to know that. Because once this is taken
6 away they can do with you what you want, whether this is
7 right-wing or left-wing, I don't care what it is. But
8 we have people (inaudible) freedom.

9 What did you want to ask me?

10 Q I wanted to ask you, when you were--before you were
11 taken to the concentration camp, was your family--were you
12 hiding out?

13 A No. I was not hiding out. At that time, after my
14 father got killed, my mother was approached--it was the car
15 from the Catholic Church, that I would be able to be taken
16 to Belgium underground, and maybe would have had a chance
17 to go into England or, I don't know, that was an illegal
18 process. And there was--but I would not want to leave my
19 mother alone. I mean, it never really entered my mind to
20 do that. I never wanted to do this.

21 Q Wait a second, I've got to turn the tape over.

22 A It never would have entered my mind but I think--
23 thinking back today, I probably--we would have had--there
24 was an opportunity for people who wanted to go underground
25 because I know many--I wouldn't call them friends--but

1 that never would have entered my mind but I think going--
2 thinking back today I--probably we would have had--there
3 was an opportunity for people who wanted to go underground
4 because I know many--I wouldn't call them friends--but
5 acquaintances who did so that we could have (inaudible)
6 but there was also thousands of people (inaudible) and
7 report anyway and the people who had them in hiding they
8 got--some of them paid with their lives. That was a very,
9 very dangerous situation.

10 Q You were approached to go underground?

11 A For the first, yes, first (sounds like "twenty") years
12 in, maybe in 1940 or--not in '40, maybe end of '41, my
13 mother was approached of sending me to these--these were
14 sisters, Catholic sisters. And they had somehow a
15 connection to Belgium, maybe even to the south of France,
16 and getting me out and--

17 Q But not your mother, just you.

18 A Not my mother, just the children and I didn't want to,
19 no. I was not willing to do that. Of course I couldn't
20 say for anyway but if I would have done this, I think I
21 would have felt all my life guilty for having survived, you
22 know. This way I don't have to feel quite as guilty. It's
23 difficult to live with, very difficult. It can put you into
24 great depressions at times, very hard.

25 Q Can I go on to--

1 A Sure.

2 Q --how--did your--how did you get to the United States?

3 A We had relatives here, my father and my mother had
4 relatives which whom we got in touch after the war and they
5 sent us the papers, you know.

6 Q Your brothers also?

7 A Yes, my two brothers, yes. Yes, they came to America.

8 Q Are they still living?

9 A Yes, they are, yes.

10 Q And do you reach--are you all really near each other?

11 A Yes, we live all, yes, but--yes, we were very lucky
12 and that was--we came to America in 1947. I came back in
13 '45 and I came the end of '47 to America, and met a
14 wonderful man. We have this week our 33rd anniversary.

15 Q Congratulations.

16 A And we came back to Washington--we were here 33 years
17 ago and we have been back once here in the meantime and we
18 came back for this reason also. We combined it, you know.

19 Q This is--I mean, I know you've been speaking really
20 personally but (inaudible) someone that didn't go through
21 what you went through. How--is that--that was good for
22 you.

23 A I don't know, I tell you in the very beginning he used
24 to talk about this. There were a lot of things to talk
25 about and my husband was very understanding because he had

1 brought out seven people including his father and mother
2 and brother and sister. But he lost all the other family
3 like all aunts and uncles, and almost all his cousins and
4 their families, you know. So, you know if you were
5 European Jew there was practically nobody who didn't lose
6 anybody, you know. They all lost people. I think if you
7 go here from table to table and would ask how many family
8 they lost or members of their family you would get quite
9 a--quite a few, you know. At times I tell you I feel very
10 happy that I can give you this interview. I was a little
11 scared for the last few weeks even to come here because,
12 like I said, it's a very emotional experience to go through
13 something like that. But the bad thing is, I ought to be
14 (sounds like = grieving these turks). You promise yourself
15 and you cannot stay away from it; it's like a magnetism
16 which pulls you always to this, you know.

17 Q I think so. Even for us, (inaudible) hard experience
18 (long inaudible - one talking over the other) absolutely.

19 A Yes. And you know, but I think Americans do understand
20 because it is a nation of immigrants, you know. I don't
21 know whether you girls are Jewish or not, but (inaudible)
22 your parents, or your grandparents, or your greatgrand-
23 parents who did come here, and you know a little bit because
24 you see anti-Semitism was in Europe always. It was always
25 there through history. And when your greatgrandparents or

1 your grandparents or even further back came, they came for
2 a reason.

3 Q Absolutely, absolutely.

4 A And--

5 Q So I think we feel it--we can't get away from it.

6 A Yes. You can't get away from it.

7 Q What do you think about anti-Semitism? Anti-Semitism
8 here, now.

9 A Oh, there's plenty around, there's plenty, and it's
10 frightening, it's frightening because I tell you I would
11 rather say that off the record because I think if this ever
12 were talked (blip in tape) this other side once--once in a
13 while one gets this New York obscurity and it has--it's
14 cloudy and the people are not very polite and still it has
15 something very special, you know, because even here I see
16 the difference. It is much cleaner than New York.

17 Q That's right.

18 A And the pace is wonderful, it's slow, but it's not
19 New York. New York is home, you know, it's a very vibrant
20 city. But especially young people, they have to be (inaud-
21 ible = re-edded) anti-Semitism still, but you see today
22 people are more intelligent and there is more communication
23 between people especially young people today. They're not
24 as narrow-minded anymore and there no--they're not just
25 raised by the New Testament. They're more broad-minded,

1 more intelligent and one can talk to them because it was
2 put completely wrong to the people, you know. And this is
3 how it started, this is how it all started.

4 Q I'm going to go back to when you were on the train
5 before you got to the camp. What happened once you got off
6 the train?

7 A What happened when we got off the train, there were
8 dozens and dozens and dozens of us, there's nazis, we shall
9 see huge women and men, they're in uniforms, and shouting
10 and you have to leave everything and just stand in line and
11 this is how you were brought into this--the trains may have
12 been outside of the ghetto and they brought you inside.
13 This is what I remember. And from there I don't even know.
14 You were a number, you were not (rors-res). I don't have
15 the number on my arm, they did not have this. But where I
16 was they had gas chambers, they were not quite finished.
17 I think if the war would have lasted four more weeks I
18 don't think one Jew would have come out alive out of Europe
19 because they just ran out of gas and they run out of trains
20 to transport them. That's why thousands and thousands of
21 people were sent from one camp to another by foot, walking,
22 actually walking, hundreds and hundreds of miles, and there
23 a lot of people really died from exhaustion. My sister-
24 in-law had a sixteen-year-old sister who died from
25 exhaustion maybe two days before the liberation, you know,

1 sixteen-year-old sister, because they ran out of everything.
2 They had no more food for their own army and they had no
3 more gasoline and they had no more trains and there was no
4 more chance to get any gasoline to make these gas chambers
5 work, but they were there.

6 Q Why do you think that you survived?

7 A I tell you the will to survive in the human being is
8 extremely strong. You can do a lot of things, you know.
9 One of my worst days or weeks I remember, this I remember
10 clearly--many details I do not remember. As the war came
11 to an end and the Germans must have known for a long time
12 that it went the other way, they wanted to get rid of the
13 evidence in the camp where I was. They must have had a
14 crematorium there because they had their ashes in cartons
15 like a large match box and they had names on there. And in
16 order to get this evidence away they wanted to destroy this,
17 they put this in the nearest, largest river there. And we
18 were working in an assembly line in the winter. It was
19 not only bitter, bitter cold, it was raining cats and dogs
20 for a whole week, like it was yesterday and the day before
21 we had here. I remember like you sitting next to me, we
22 gave these boxes from one to the other and the ashes through
23 the rain was actually dripping on us, you know, and there
24 were big Germans trucks standing there who took these boxes.
25 But, you know, we were young girls, you understand, and

1 even--it is almost terrible to say--but this made you alive,
2 we used to laugh about this, not what we were doing, but
3 that the ashes were dripping. And let's say his name was
4 Herman, one would say, look at here, Herman is dripping
5 all over me, or something like this.

6 But, you know, things like this makes you forget for
7 a moment. The memory was so great, in order to live through
8 a misery like this you had to see a star someplace,
9 otherwise you die right then and there. Can you understand
10 this?

11 Q Yes. In the little ways of life.

12 A In little ways, that you could make a joke out of your
13 own misery because otherwise I would have died a million
14 times, you know. These little, little things.

15 Q But there were other people that were your age that
16 died, so there's something in you--

17 A There were younger, yes, there were younger people who--
18 like who came to such an extreme physical exhaustion and
19 they were just--the body couldn't take any more and they
20 just died and they got very sick and get colds because it
21 was bitter cold, they had no shoes. I must say, and I am
22 happy to say that I have not been sick in this three years
23 because it's a long time and I had many a times I was
24 hungry and cold and whatever goes with it, but my--I
25 just had the constitution that I could take it, yes. There

1 were many young people who died, you know. And don't
2 forget, when you could not work, if you were not of use to
3 them anymore they--then they wanted to get rid of you one
4 way or another, and they did, they didn't ask twice, you
5 know. But, in general, there are people here who have been
6 in places, in Auschwitz and in other camps, who had to dig
7 their own graves and were just thrown in there and they ran
8 over them in their new (inaudible) some of them came out
9 alive, you know. I mean, you know, it's just unbelievable--
10 it's unbelievable what a human being can go through and
11 survive.

12 But one thing I always say, they wouldn't get me a
13 second time. I'm going to jump from the Empire State
14 Building, not a second time. But it's amazing what a human
15 being can go through.

16 Q --testimony to that.

17 A Yes.

18 Q How was your will power?

19 A The will to live is very--it's enormous, the will to
20 live is very strong, very strong, you know.

21 Q There's some other questions here. What did they do
22 with pregnant woman? Was there any kind of medical
23 experiments that went on in your camp?

24 A Yes. In fact, I knew--I don't know exactly whether it
25 happened in my camp but they were sent right away to another

1 camp, you know. And once, I knew a girl very, very well--
2 she was in Auschwitz--and she was in the hands of Mengele,
3 I don't have to tell you, you know. My brother himself
4 had an operation on his leg which was performed with a
5 bread knife, with a rusty bread knife. But he also was
6 young and, like I said, he survived, you know. Somebody
7 can take this and others cannot, you know.

8 Q What about the years after, like the years up to the--
9 what--how do you cope with that?

10 A How do you cope, you see, I tell you, you don't cope.
11 I always say that it was almost (inaudible) that all people
12 who were--came out of a concentration camp should have
13 been in therapy because no matter how real, I always say
14 we're all a little crazy, believe it or not, yes. Because
15 nobody, nobody ever survives this and comes out unscarred,
16 you know.

17 Q Like groups like this, this is a good start to--

18 A Yes, but you know, you see these people nicely dressed
19 and very superficial, you don't look into their hearts, you
20 know. Here are women who had babies that are taken away
21 from them, started a new life, they remarried and had new
22 families. There was this very, very good-looking woman,
23 a very handsome woman who must be in her early 60's there
24 in the (sounds like ate-cow), she had given birth in
25 Auschwitz and Mengele wanted this baby but he said he wanted

1 to wait a few days and she said the baby was strong, there
2 were no diapers, there was nothing. And she took a piece
3 of her uniform and she put a piece of bread crust, whatever
4 she got, and put in water and the baby's suction was still
5 there, there is a natural thing, but she had nothing to give
6 to the baby. The baby died, thank God, after three days,
7 and Mengele came for her and was looking for the baby on a
8 pile of dead people, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds,
9 and the little baby, or just--he only couldn't find that
10 baby, he was very angry with her, but they were hiding her
11 from him. So she lived through it, and she talked on the
12 television without a tear in her eye. And you say to
13 yourself, how was it possible. But maybe she talked like
14 we do here and it was on tape and later she was able to do
15 this, otherwise you wouldn't have been able to do this,
16 you know. It's--once you have this--my children sometimes
17 ask this question to my--how can one survive? One does
18 survive, but don't ask how. It's hard, it's hard to survive,
19 you know.

20 Q Do you--so do you suggest, do you ever go--have you
21 ever gone to therapy?

22 A Yes, yes, yes. After many years I felt that I needed
23 it, yes, and I do regret today that I had not done this
24 before. It would help me greatly in raising my children,
25 not being so nervous and not going into sometimes great

1 exultations and very deep depressions. I think it would
2 have stabilized my life a little better, yes. And this I
3 really think that was wrong because all people who came
4 should have had this kind of therapy, you know, because
5 there is an art to which you survive, believe me, a great
6 art.

7 Q Or afterwards of the survivalists, what was surviving
8 in the camp?

9 A You pick up a normal life and, in many ways, also
10 educational-wise, you missed a lot of schooling which you
11 tried to pick up yourself by a lot of reading and you
12 educate yourself because I always used to say to myself,
13 in later life, my gosh, this is no excuse to say I don't
14 know this because at that time I was in a concentration
15 camp, you know. And as I said, I was very lucky. I have a
16 wonderful family, I came out of it, I really can say--I
17 wouldn't say, yes, on top and, no, on top. On top only ever
18 so often, sometimes it's on the bottom rung, you know.

19 Q You seem so aware of who you are as a person.

20 A Yes, as a person you are, you are very much aware of
21 this, who you are, yes. You are aware of many more things,
22 you have also more feelings for poverty and for poor people
23 and (inaudible) It shocks me to see Washington; I never
24 thought--you don't even see as many blacks. The poverty
25 in New York, what you see here, shocks me. It really shocks

1 me. This morning we gave a man money to have breakfast.
2 The man was actually shocked; he was in shock. I mean, this
3 you don't--you don't see this terrible poverty in New York.
4 I haven't seen this and I see-I'm all over the city, you
5 know. But you're more aware of it when you have (inaudible)
6 what these people we have counsel I think you become more
7 sensitive to all this. You're more aware.

8 Q Did you do any kind of work when you came to the
9 United States?

10 A Yes, I was trained as a medical therapist, yes, yes.

11 Q Are you still doing that?

12 A No, not any more. I'm not that well any more because,
13 you know, like I say, everybody was in a concentration
14 camp. I have a very bad, sensitive stomach; I had a very
15 bad stomach ulcer as a result of this, you know. So, not
16 any more, not any more, but I did, you know. I used to do
17 medical massages and therapy, yes.

18 Q That's great.

19 A Yes.
Another voice:

20 Q That's wonderful, yeah. No, I think that's fine and
21 did you ask her the seven really brief questions in the
22 beginning? Interviewer's voice: I mean, I know I got your
23 name. Other voice: I think you did ask all of that, yeah.
24 Yeah, you did, you got all of them. Interviewer's voice:
25 Yes, I did. Okay, we can stop.

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