

Let's start? So tell us again why your mother didn't leave home.

My mother didn't leave, first of all, because she wanted to see to it that my sister is able to leave and go to Belgium. And so she was waiting for that.

However, there were other reasons. She was very apprehensive about leaving. She was apprehensive about leaving everything that she did. Not to any possessions because we didn't have any money or anything. But just of the house, and the bed, and you know, the people around her.

And going to an unknown with absolutely nothing, with no ability to earn money, with no ability to support herself. My father didn't have the ability, either. I mean, it wasn't just that she didn't.

But everybody felt that women and children, during the First World War, it was also a war against Germany, and yet, women and children were supposed to have been safe. And people, they actually had the illusion, actually the delusion, that the same thing is going to happen during this war, that women and children are not going to be bothered.

So she didn't feel that she was at the point of emergency to leave. But of course, her first concern was to see to it that my sister is safe abroad.

How did your father and how did you feel about her staying behind?

I felt terrible about it. And I was right feeling terrible because her experiences were horrendous. She had horrible experiences. She was--

Could you tell me it again, saying-- I need a complete sentence.

Oh.

So you felt horrible about your mother staying behind.

I felt terrible about leaving my mother behind and knowing that she's going to remain under the German occupation. However, you know, there wasn't anything I could do about it. Because she made her decision. My sister made her decision. And I felt that there was nothing I could do to influence them to change it. So I had to leave.

And how about your father? How did he feel about your mother staying behind?

He was also heartbroken about it. But again, he certainly had no way of influencing her by, you know. And nobody knew what was going to happen. And we thought that who knew? I mean, maybe she would be able to leave in a few months. Maybe she would be able to.

And nobody knew, which was actually the safe thing. Well, you can advise somebody to leave, and then they can be caught by the Germans and shot on the border or arrested. You didn't know what's going to happen to people. So you couldn't really just say, you must go. Because I know you must go. You couldn't say that. You felt that these people maybe have a better instinct. Who knew?

Good, good. Could we cut for just a second. Mark?

OK.

From my stepmother.

You rolling?

Yep.

I am.

One sec.

OK.

Why didn't your mother decide to leave with you?

Well, my mother decided to stay as long to see to it that my sister had a chance to go back to Belgium. And you didn't know how long it would take to get a visa, and get the papers, and everything. That was one reason. The second reason was that she was totally, you know, unprepared--

Look at John, please. It looked a lot like you were looking at the camera.

The other reason was--

Can we-- why don't we start all over?

Oh.

I'm sorry. And try and make eye contact.

I know. I know. I was trying to find different way of putting it. I don't know.

You don't need to find a new way.

Just a minute. It's going to get boring. Hold on because I have to get my voice back.

My mother decided to stay in Warsaw with my sister to make sure that she has a chance to go back to Belgium as she wanted. The other reason why she stayed was that she wanted-- the going was so uncertain.

You didn't know where you're going, you didn't know what you're going to encounter. Whether you're going to be able to get through the border or not, get arrested or not, what would happen to you. And even after you reach your destination, you had no means of support.

And here in Warsaw, she had her friends, she had some of her family, her cousins, et cetera. She had people. She had her home. And it was very difficult to leave it all and just go into the unknown.

And also, the general opinion was that the Germans-- excuse me, I have to stop that-- that the Germans are not going to kill or arrest women and children because during the last war, the First World War, women and children were not really bothered to the extent that men were. They weren't killed, they weren't arrested. That was all concentrated on the men.

So therefore, I guess, taking all this into consideration, she decided to stay in Warsaw and not leave.

And how did you and your father respond to that?

Who?

You and your father.

Oh, me and my father. Oh. Well, we were quite distressed, of course. Because I personally, and my father did, too, realized the danger that she was putting herself into because she was still under the German occupation. And the

Germans were totally unpredictable. I mean, if anything, they were predictable to the worst extent.

So we were very distressed. But there was no way of persuading her. Because at that moment, she had made up her mind that she had to see my sister out of the country. That was her aim. And the second reason, as I explained, was that she was very uncertain where she was going. So there was no way of persuading her.

And there was also another reason. People thought that they could leave at any time. They thought, OK, things are not going to change much. If we are not leaving now, maybe I'll be able to live in two months, three months, or so, you know. So it wasn't such a final thing, final decision yet.

The situation was such, the Germans created the ghetto in Warsaw right away, the Jewish people were not able to go outside the ghetto. And afterwards, after the ghetto uprising, the ghetto was burned during the ghetto operation. There was nothing left. And everybody was either killed or tried to hide on the Polish side, on the Aryan side. This was the case with my mother.

And how did she survive?

During the time that the ghetto was formed-- I don't know whether I should go through her being a teacher and teaching in the underground schools, because you--

Sure, sure, but briefly.

She was--

So start with how does your mother-- my mother survived by.

My mother survived the ghetto. During the time of the ghetto, she was a teacher and teaching in the underground schools. After the ghetto was destroyed, she left. For a while, she was working in the Schulz factory, I went through this also.

After the ghetto was destroyed, she was given a Polish identity. And she stayed in an attic of a Polish house, where she was hiding and unable to go outside at all. And she stayed there until the Soviet army entered Poland.

And then where did she go?

Well, then she was a free person. Then she was a free person. She became a member of the committee for refugees in Poland. And when we found out that she was alive, through some kind of a radio broadcast, my father made attempts right away to get a visa for her, of course.

She left Poland to go to Sweden. She stayed in Sweden for a while. And came to New York in 1946. Was it '46? I don't remember. It was, yeah.

OK. John, before you go on, I'm just curious how--

The time was all the war time, all the war years. We did have correspondence with-- you could correspond with people in ghetto. So as a matter of fact, I still have some of her ghetto letters.

And I have one letter from ghetto from my aunt, which is really a very interesting letter, you could see, with all the censored parts burned out. Practically half of the letters is all black. But you were able to correspond with people from ghetto. So we knew that where she was. And she was getting our letters, some of them. Well, not all of them, but some of them, anyhow.

OK. Let's go back to you in Vilna. How did you get a visa? How did you get out?

Well, I got a visa on the basis of my father's visa. My father was on the list and I was his daughter, so I was given a visa as his daughter. It wasn't a special visa for me, it's just as a daughter.

And as I think I explained to you, after my father left under the assumed name, went to Japan, a few weeks later, I left with a group of people through the Trans-Siberian Express to Vladivostok through Korea to Japan. And that's where I met my father.

Great. Did anything happen on the Trans-Siberian Railroad? Did you have to give up rubles in Vladivostok?

No, this was all paid for. It was arranged. It was paid to the Intourist, which was a Soviet kind of a company, travel company. It was paid up here in United States. So it was all paid. The transportation was paid. We had our meals on the train. We slept on the train. There were two levels, like benches. And you slept on these benches.

And it was all-- the entire train was actually full of refugees. First, we went to Moscow, where we stayed in a hotel for a week. And then I remember, in Moscow, I sold all my dresses because I didn't have any money and I wanted to go to the opera.

So I took a chance because would I have been caught selling dresses on the black market, I would have been arrested and never heard from again. So I was worried. But I mean, I was young, I thought I was going into freedom, and I was just so exhilarated, I didn't care. Just wanted to see the opera and go places.

So you weren't afraid on the Trans-Siberian Railroad?

No, I was not afraid. Not at all.

I thought you had to leave your suitcase behind and stuff, how did you have your stuff?

Well, that happened. Yeah. You see, when we were on the first segment of our escape from Warsaw, when we were in this house of the guide, of the peasant guide, Polish peasant guide, after you know, we established that the ice was too thin and it was so hard to get across, the guy said, well we just have too many suitcases. It's just too heavy to drive across the ice these suitcases.

And so we decided to leave a suitcase behind. And a lady with whom we traveled, who was more or less more of an adult said that she's going to give me enough clothes for whatever I need. And that she advises me to leave my suitcase behind. So I said, OK. And I left my suitcase behind. I was left with nothing when I arrived in Vilna. I don't remember whether she gave me anything or not.

OK. Could you go over again and pretend as though you're telling me for the first time? Why did your father have to disguise himself? Why was he in such grave danger in Vilna?

Well, my father, who was a Jewish journalist, was also a lecturer. And as a lecturer, he traveled all over small towns and cities of Poland and gave lectures. Well, there were no movies, there were no any kind of entertainment. And his lectures were mostly on literature and politics.

And his lectures were very well-attended. He was very popular and very well-known. His face was very well-known. He was well-known by friends and foe. And since he was a socialist and Social Democrat, his views were distinctly anti-communist.

And the communists actually were gunning for him. And they were looking for him. There were a lot of agents, just scattered all over, trying to find him and arrest him. So that when we were in Vilna and Kovno, it was obvious that if he appears any place in public as Baruch Schaffner, he would be arrested.

So that our underground got false identity papers for him. His name became Isaac Braude. He grew a beard and a mustache and he went into hiding.

He left you back in Vilna, correct?

No, no. I was in Kovno.

Kovno, sorry.

I was in Kaunas. Kovno is in Polish, you say it Kovno. But it's Kaunas in Lithuanian.

When he left you, what was your departure like? Did you cry?

Well, no, he didn't leave, actually. I had to take him. He went with a friend of his whose wife was a friend of mine into hiding together. And both I and his wife, Paula-- this is this friend's wife, Paula-- found a little place for him about an hour from Kaunas in a small town. And it wasn't a town. It was like a farm place, a farming community, outside of Kaunas, about an hour.

And we had to get there by bus. Not only did we go by bus, but we also had to-- when we visited them, we had to cross a forest, which was full of Soviet soldiers. It was very dangerous, actually, to do. However, that's what we did.

After we established them in this hut, we had to bring them papers, news, food, and all the things that they needed. So we visited them quite often. It wasn't like I parted from him and I didn't see him anymore. I was his lifeline.

I mean, how about when you got on the Trans-Siberian Railroad, where was your father then?

When I got out of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, that was Vladivostok.

No, no. Where was your father?

In Japan.

He was already in Japan?

Yeah. He left ahead of me.

Right, so how was that-- when he left ahead of you, how was that?

Well, I was together with a lot of friends. I was together with Paula, the one that, you know, was--

OK. What I'm asking about you is were you worried for your father's safety when he left?

I was worried all the time. When he arrived in Japan already. No.

So we need to go again, and you need to say, I was worried about my father. You have to give me the subject.

I was very worried about my father until he left the Soviet Union. I mean, he left Lithuania, the Soviet Union, whatever you want to call it. That's when I was worried. I wasn't worried about him once he left. And once I knew he was going toward Japan, because that was he was going towards safety. Not toward danger. He was escaping from danger. So I was delighted that he left.

And how was your reunion in Japan?

In Japan, well, there was, of course, a very joyful reunion, as you may expect. And I was absolutely exhilarated because I felt that I achieved freedom. Japan to us was freedom out of Hitler's domination, out of the Soviet domination, I mean it was something unbelievable. I mean, free world. Well, didn't compare with coming to America. But still, it was

incredibly wonderful to be in the world.

Before you go on, John, earlier, Mary, you had a story about--

Oh, OK. Well, I did miss telling you about, really, the most traumatic part of my father's hiding. That is that to get papers, exit papers, he had to go back to Kaunas from this little town. And I had to take him into an office of a Soviet governmental office, where they were interrogating people prior to giving them permissions and stamp their papers for exiting the Soviet Union.

When I had to take him there, you had to be there in person. You just couldn't do it. You couldn't go and get it for him in his name. I had to bring. He had to be there. And I had to bring him over there. And he had to stay in the waiting room. Stand, actually because there were no seats or anything. Crowded with people. Crowded with Soviet agents, who were just looking for people like that to arrest.

And this took sometimes hours. And each hour to me was like an eternity. Because I was just petrified that any minute, somebody is going to grab him and arrest him. So to go through this and wait with him, [MUMBLING], I was in one end of the room, he was on the other end of the room.

We just didn't even look at each other, of course. But this was a just very horrifying experience for me, very traumatic, and very, very stressful. For each such visit to the offices of the Soviet officials was an absolute horror for me.

I hate to do this to you. But can you tell me one more time with my father? You kept saying he, and we don't know who he is.

Oh. The same thing?

Yeah. How am I going to go through?

But a little shorter, a little shorter.

Where do I start?

And at the end of the story, tell me that he got a visa. That you were successful.

Tell the end of the story, how he traveled through Russia?

No, no, just tell me that you brought your father to the office, you were scared, but in the end, he got the visa that he needed.

Oh, OK. OK. I wish I knew this and before, that I need to say my father and repeat it, OK.

One of the most dangerous, one of the most troubling.

One of the most stressful experiences that I had regarding my father's safety was when I had to bring him over to the Soviet bureaus for interrogation by the Soviet officials prior to their giving my father the exit visa and permits to travel through Soviet Union. This took place in Kaunas.

I had to bring my father to a waiting room full of people and full of, actually, Soviet agents, who were just waiting for a chance to pounce at somebody and arrest him. And this waiting in this room was sometimes as long as a couple of hours or many hours, and each minute was an eternity.

Well, I went through this. And this was, really, a horrifying experience, very, very stressful for me. And for my father, needless to say, as well. However, at the end, he did get all his papers. My father did get all his papers. And he was able to travel under this assumed identity through Soviet Union to Japan, where I followed him a few weeks later. And we

met in Japan.

What did you expect to find in Japan? I mean, you had never been to Japan before.

No.

What did you think?

Well it was very-- I expected a very exotic country. Of course, you see the kimonos and you see the Japanese people. But I remember one thing about Japan there was. I was absolutely enchanted by the little babies who were sitting in their mother's [? obo ?] in the back and looking out. And she was just walking around as if nothing happened. They were just enchanting. I thought the Japanese babies were the most beautiful babies in the world.

Tell me what happened to you, what was the unusual incident that you had in Japan.

Yeah. I would have really been very enchanted with Japan because of the freedom that I felt of myself, being so free. However, I had one very unpleasant experience. I was walking down a hilly street, clutching with my clutch bag under my arm, when a Japanese fellow on a bicycle racing down the street just grabbed my bag and flew off with it.

I had in my bag most of my papers, all my old photographs, some money, et cetera. Luckily, my visa, American visa, and my exit papers from Lithuania were left in the hotel. So this is all that I had left, actually.

I went to the police station over there and wanted to make a report. And I did make a report. And I was waiting over there. But I heard such horrible screams of people being beaten that I left just without inquiring any further as to what happened, if anything would happen, if I would ever recover my pocketbook.

We're at the end of the tape.