

Has anyone said how wonderful you look?

Camera roll nine. Continue.

OK, thank you.

Side three. [INAUDIBLE].

I had a friend of mine do my makeup. I usually do pretty good myself, but this time I [INAUDIBLE].

All set?

Yes.

So they brought up a good point. How did your mother not have papers but you did have papers?

OK. The reason my mother didn't have any papers was because of the quota system that there was in all over Europe, but each country had its own quota. As a family, there was one quota. As minors, there was another quarter, and then as a parent joining children, there was another quota. So when our relatives tried to make out the papers for all three of us in 1937, they found the quota was like maybe five or six-year wait to get into the United States.

But they were told that if we come first-- the quota for minors is much shorter. If we come first, there was only like about a two-to-three-year waiting period. And then when we get here, we could send for our mother, which was a very short quota period, and that's why my mother did not have the papers at the same time but we did.

And that's what actually we did. Finally, when we came to this country, when we arrived here in November 22, 1940, our families, my mother's sisters and brothers, immediately started to make out affidavits requesting for her to join her children. And that's how she received a visa in Shanghai and then to the United States.

Tell me about what it was like to leave your mother the second time, and if you could, explain why your mother wasn't leaving with you but very, very briefly. You had a Sugihara visa, but your mother did not.

My mother did not have-- the second time that we-- I'll start from the beginning. When we were ready to leave Vilna for Japan to get the Trans-Siberian Railroad, it was a very-- it was sort of like a finality. It was almost like saying goodbye. We'll never see each other again because Mother, at that time, had with no way of getting out whatsoever. She had no papers. She had a passport, but she had no visa to go to Japan. She had not visa to go to the United States.

And we sort of felt hopeless that we'll never see her again, and that was devastating. I'll never forget that scene, very devastating, leaving my mother on the train, on that station. My sister and I were, first of all, scared. It was a very frightening experience, the whole thing, once we left her because the Russians were not very friendly towards the refugees.

And just crossing that tremendous-- it took seven days and eight nights. I've been disputed. They say it took eight days and nine nights, but we remember it as seven days and eight nights, that trip across Siberia. First we went from Vilna. We made a stop in Minsk.

Then we made a-- then we went to Moscow, and we stayed there for about three or four days in a hotel. And we had to wait for the train, the Trans-Siberian train, and it was only going once a week.

Did you have any fun? Did you go to the opera?

Yes, we went to-- we went to a ballet.

OK. Tell me "while in Moscow."

While in Moscow, we went to a ballet, and we also went--

Sorry. You were talking when I was talking. [INAUDIBLE]--

Oh, I'm sorry.

--when both of us are talking. So when you were in Moscow, what'd you do?

We were in Moscow for about three days, and we were with those two women and two men. And we went one night-- I remember going to a ballet, and one day we went sightseeing. But we were always-- we were always watched, always watched, always Secret Service. We felt it. We knew it. They were always there watching us.

But I remember we took a sightseeing tour, and they took us down to the subways, which were beautiful-- they were like museums, clean-- and Lenin's tomb, and a few other famous-- the Red Square and all that we went and saw that day. And that's about it.

But in the hotel, on each floor there was someone sitting there always, watching people going and coming here to sign in, sign out, very regimented. And we felt strange and scared. We were kids.

Did you play games or do you remember-- what would you have done if something had happened to your sister, if you and your sister had gotten separated?

Oh, I don't know what I really-- what we really would have done without each other. I don't know how we would have survived. I suppose who did, but this had never occurred to us, never occurred to us. As a matter of fact, as I told you-- as I said-- no.

Just tell me new.

My sister and I was so close and had such a-- what is the word I'm looking for? No [? string, ?] such attachment and such a devotion.

Can you start over?

My sister and I had an unusual relationship. We were very, very devoted to each other, no restrictions upon our devotion. Even after we got married, had our children, it was just like two bodies and one soul, as one of my daughters used to say. We had an unwritten agreement between us. If anything ever happened to one of us, we would take care of each other's children. We never spoke about it.

And my sister passed away. She immigrated to Israel. She got married. She met an Israeli, and after 20 years, they moved to Israel. And she contracted cancer, and she died within a year. And it was just natural. Her daughter came to live with me. She was nine years old, and I brought her up. And if anything would have happened to me, she would have done the same thing. It was an unreal devotion and relationship. We shared everything.

Let's go back a bit to the Trans-Siberian Railroad. You were strip-searched in Vladivostok?

We were searched. We were not strip-- we had women who searched us when we got to Vladivostok, patted us and all that. But they didn't make us get undressed. It's a good thing they didn't because we would have never left Vladivostok if they did because my sister and I smuggled through that emblem that you have the picture of. We smuggled that through, which is-- if they would've found it on us, they would have surely arrested us. That was considered, as they said, contraband, which is illegal things.

Can you tell me the story about the Betar-- what is it, a medallion?

It was like a medal of recognition, which was given out to the--

Can you start again? Just very briefly, though, what did you bring with you? What did you take out of Vilna?

Out of Vilna we took out some of the things that our mother gave us to take with us, not very much, and one of the things that we took with us was this particular emblem which we brought from Volozhin which was given to us hopefully that we will be able to bring it out into the world and rescue it, which we tried very hard and we were successful in.

It was a medal of recognition to our town, to a group from the main Zionist organization in Warsaw, and it was signed and all that for recognition and for doing good work, whatever. I can't even remember the inscription on it, but it was very meaningful.

And they hoped that we would be able to rescue it, and we did. And I hope one day-- I hope to-- what do you call that-- when the exhibit is over, I'm going to offer it to the museum to keep it.

What else did you bring on your trip? Or what did you--

Well, we brought those two blankets that my mother gave us when we left Volozhin. They were actually her trousseau blankets. She gave it to us to keep us warm, and we did. And we brought some crafts, things that we used to do, and I don't know why mother took those. I guess they were-- she gave us that, I guess, to remember what we did or something. It must have had some special meaning. It didn't have a particular meaning to us at that time, but it has an awful lot of meaning to me now.

And what else did we-- we had no jewelry, and we had no-- my mother was the one that brought the French clock. She carried it. It came in a special carrying case. And for the life of me, I don't know how they permitted it because it's a gold-plated, very rare cloth, and it has inscriptions in Russian. And it's very valuable.

And some of the silver-- a little silver box and a sugar tongs. And what else? I have a little Jew star that I usually wear. I took it off today. I took that with me, and I didn't wear it. I guess it would have been against the law to wear it. And let's see. What else? My mother brought the candlesticks. Those were hers.

And how about those?

We also had-- excuse me?

A silver bowl?

Oh, yes. This is a little, tiny-- it's a little dish where my mother used to-- during Passover, used the charoises, the special herbs that we used. And she used to use that, and it has an inscription there. And we got that.

What else? Pictures, some pictures, an album. I had an album. I still have the album. It's falling apart, but I have it with pictures in it.

How about-- let me think. So let's go-- what did you expect when you got to Japan? Here you had never been away from home before, and here is a totally different race of people.

Well, when we got to Japan, of course, it was very strange, and as I said, I've never seen Japanese people. I remember being in a-- and when we stayed in the hotel, later on I found that there were-- those women, what do you call them? Geisha girls. Am I pronouncing it right?

Geisha?

Geisha girls. They used to have Geisha parties in the hotels, and they were quite noisy. And my sister and I used to be so frightened. We used to-- I know we had double beds. We used to climb into one bed to be together. We didn't know anything about it, what they were or anything, but later on I found out what they were all about. It was very strange and very, very insecure feeling, very insecure.

How long did you stay there in Japan?

About a month. We stayed--

How long did you stay in Japan, and who paid for or made your arrangements?

Well, we stayed in Japan-- when we arrived in Tokyo, we were-- we left November 9th.

OK. You don't have to get into that. Did you stay a week, or two weeks, or a month?

About a month, about a month. I was trying to figure out how long was it. It was about a month, and the way we were able to-- no, I'll go back. Our relatives from the United States wired some money to us, to the American consulate, and that's how we were able to survive in Japan. Our family from the United States sent us money.

And it wasn't much, but it was enough for us to get along, to pay for the-- it was a little hotel not far from the consulate. And it was a very meager diet, bread, sardines, and fruit, but we got along very good. And we didn't go anywhere. We really did not sightsee or anything.

And were you able to-- who made your arrangements for your voyage to the US, and what was that like?

You mean the arrangement from where, from Japan?

Yes.

Oh, yes, our family, my aunts and uncles, paid through Cook Travel Agency. They paid in an awful lot of money. We went first class on the President Coolidge because that was the only available transportation they were able to get for us, and they wanted to get us out of there soon as possible.

So they arranged for us first class, and it was a very nice experience to be on the President Coolidge first class. If I have time, I'll tell you a little funny story. We traveled first class, but we had two friends travel second class. And first class-- it was very luxurious. And we had no one except this woman that we met on the boat to spend time with, so we used to go down to the second class to visit our friends.

We had no problems getting down, but we had problems coming up because they believe we belonged to the first class. So the first time, we had to show them our passport, and after that, they got to know us because we were on the boat for two weeks.

Tell me who you traveled with. Who was the woman? And tell me her name.

Yeah. When we got on the boat, the President Coolidge, we, of course, didn't speak any English. And they were trying to ask us our name. We understood enough of that, but anything else we didn't understand. And there was this woman sitting by in the lounge there, and she saw the difficulties they were having.

And we said Yiddish. She heard that we were saying we speak Yiddish and Polish. So she came over, and she says, can I be of help? I speak Yiddish. So she was a Jewish woman that was married to an officer who was stationed in China, and she was coming home for a visit. And that's why she happened to be on the boat, and she was traveling alone.

So they asked her if she would mind sitting with us and keeping us company. She says no, so they put us with her at the table. And we spend a lot of time with her. She taught us a lot of things.

What was her name?

Her name was Mrs. [? Yount, ?] and she lived in San Diego. For a while we kept in touch with her, and we sort of lost touch after a couple of years.

Any other questions about the journey or [INAUDIBLE]?

Sure.

Well, it was--

Start with "the transit."

When we got on the-- yes.

Go ahead.

When we boarded a train and the Trans-Siberian Railroad--

Sorry. You need to look--

Go ahead.

You need to pause between my talking and your starting.

OK, all right.

So tell me about the Trans-Siberian Railroad.

When we got on the train, we were assigned a cabin and--

I'm sorry. Start, "When we got on the Trans-Siberian."

Oh, when we got on the--

You can always take a breath because you have lots of time. So just take a breath. [INAUDIBLE].

Go ahead. Ask me.

Can you tell me about what your trip on the Trans-Siberian Railroad was like?

When we got on the Trans-Siberian Railroad train, we were assigned a cabin, my sister and I, and then we were also told where the dining car is. And in general, it was not a bad accommodation. The dining room was very nice.

But it was very bleak. You rode for seven days and nights through ice, though snow. We used to have a couple of stops. Like once a day they would stop at a railroad stop. But my sister and I never got off the train because we were afraid we might miss it, or we'll get lost, or something. So we just stayed on the train.

We would sometimes get off the train and stay right by the door, but we never went anywhere except in one place. There is a city in Siberia. It's called Birobidzhan, and that was at one time-- they thought they were going to make a haven for the Jews. So there was a lot of Jewish riding and all the signs in the railway station had the name Birobidzhan in Jewish, Yiddish.

And so we got off the train, and it's sort of like, I would say, maybe about 100 yards where the little building was there. And we got in there, and we looked around. And my sister and I went right back on the train. That's the only place we got off.

And that was like about the fifth or sixth day of the trip, way inside of Siberia. And then we arrived in Vladivostok. Vladivostok was a very, very busy port, very busy port. And we stayed there a couple of days-- I don't remember exactly how many days-- because we had to wait for a boat to cross to Tsuruga.

How was the voyage from Vladivostok to Tsuruga?

Oh, we got on a-- our accommodations on the boat to Tsuruga was on a freighter, and there were just four passengers. They had no room for passengers, so it was just us and the crew. And it was very nice, except they were carrying spices, and the spices made us sick, the smell of the spices.

But the crew was very nice to us. We used to have meals with the crew, and they gave us nice accommodation, a room, a cabin. And that was nice. That took about five days, four or five days. I don't recall exactly. But that was OK.

When you got to the US, where did you go?

Well, my sister and I arrived in San Francisco. The boat was-- we made a stop in Honolulu, and then we arrived in San Francisco. And I could tell you one thing-- the sight of the Golden Gate was the most beautiful sight in the world. San Francisco is still my favorite city. It is.

And when we arrived, our family made arrangements for-- oh, I can't remember those organizations which-- they took care of us for the day. We had to wait for a whole day to get a train to come to New York. There were no planes then at that time. You went by train.

Oh, I can't think of [? this name, ?] but two nice young girls, and they wore special uniforms. And they were taking care of us for the day, and they took a sighting of San Francisco, to the farmer's market and all of that. Since then I've been there a number of times, and I enjoy it every time. But the Golden Gate is--

And then you came to New York?

We came to-- when my sister and I came to New York by train, it took about three days from San Francisco to New York, and made a stop in Chicago. And two of my uncles met us at the train. We never saw them. We never knew them, but we recognized each other.

And then we came to live with one of my aunts and uncles, who actually were the most instrumental in bringing us here, who did actually most of-- there was a lot of hard work in it, the affidavits, and making [INAUDIBLE], and waiting, and going. But they had no children, and they were very anxious to have us. But I would say they were not very affluent people. They were candy store owner, but they were wonderful people. They gave up themselves.

And how did you get your mother here?

Well, after my sister and I arrived here, my mother's brothers and sisters, our aunts and uncles, started to make out the affidavits right away to bring her here as a mother to be reunited with her children. And there was not actually a very limited quote, not much of a quota, and she would have had to-- and she actually waited a very short time to get a visa.

And my mother got her visa, and she left on the last boat that left Shanghai to go to Manila. And I don't recall the exact date, but it must have been like around December 1, 1941. She was in Manila a few days, and she boarded the boat to go to the United States on December 5, 1941.

And the war broke out December 7, 1941. She was on the high seas when it broke out, and they joined a military convoy. And they went through Australia and all around until they got to San Francisco on Christmas Day in 1941.

Can you tell me that story once again but say "the Japanese bombed--"

Re-load.