

[TEST TONE] OK, turning over. Here we go. That's good.

Did you put in a new tape there?

Yes.

All right.

So tell me about the story about-- you exhausted all of-- you wanted to get a visa. You kept going to [PLACE NAME], you gave up hope. Then you heard about Sugihara.

You want-- yeah, I'm not doing it. Can I say something? You want me to say all this what you just said?

Pretty much, yes. I mean, take me through-- take me through your mind.

OK. I don't have to go back how I got to Vilna?

No, no.

No. All I have to tell you is that we get to Vilna and we wanted to go out, where we were covering all the consulates and embassies.

Right.

All right.

So tell me about your experiences with all the other embassies--

And consulates.

--and consulates, and then tell me about the Sugihara story. Go ahead.

So finally, when we finally got to Vilna, we're happy to get there. Because here, we had the opportunity to get to the consulates and embassies who were representing most of the countries in the world. And we were just going from one consulate to the other to the embassies, begging and telling them about our tragic situation.

And no one would pay any attention to us. No one wanted us. We were just rejected by all the consulates, by all the embassies. We were desperate, absolutely desperate. We didn't see any hope, absolutely no hope. We just were a people with no land, nobody to turn to.

And then we heard about Chiune Sugihara. By hearing about other refugees going to his consulate and getting a transit visa, if you had a Curacao visa, which is one of the small Dutch islands in the Caribbean.

The problem was that I did not have a passport. So my husband had then difficulties putting me on his passport. And then by the time we had all those formalities, the Dutch consulate, which was an honorary consul, he already left the city. So we went to the consulate, of the Japanese consulate, and it was my husband who got to see Mr. Sugihara.

And he told him about what has happened to us. And he already knew about from the other refugees. And despite that we did not have a visa to get somewhere-- because transit visa is only to get you somewhere. Consul Sugihara granted us this wonderful visa for life, the transit visa.

Great, great. Can you tell me the story of why you got remarried in Lithuania?

Well, that was before we even knew about Sugihara. But we were going to-- we got remarried in Vilna.

You could start over again with we got?

OK. We got remarried in Vilna. Because the wedding certificate what we had, I don't even have it. Which was the wedding. I'll start over. OK?

Do you know what that buzz is?

I don't know. Is it--

The refrigerator?

39.

Standing by.

OK. Here we go.

And rolling.

Can you tell me about your marriage, your second wedding in Lithuania? Why, and what was it like, and also, did you remember the date?

We got married again in Lithuania. My first wedding, which took place in Lwow, was a religious wedding. And we didn't have any certificate. For the Russian government, you need to have something, a different type of certificate. You had to have also a civil wedding. So we had to go to a rabbi to get remarried. We took some two witnesses with us. And we never mentioned to the rabbi that we were previously married because otherwise, he would not have granted us this certificate.

So we got that. And were very overjoyed. I mean, to tell you the truth, I didn't even remember what date it was because my only wedding anniversary, which we always celebrated, was the 26th of December. That's the date when we were married in the Lwow. But I never knew about the second one until today.

Why did you need-- did we get that? I can't remember. I don't know if you told us why you needed to get remarried.

Well, my first-- our first wedding was strictly a religious wedding, which was not recognized by the Russian authorities. Because they didn't have much use for religion. So we realized that in order if you want to get somewhere and if you do want to get a visa, just in case, we should get a civil-- have a civil wedding. And have a certificate to show to the Russians that we are married. So we decided to do it.

Great. Can you tell me about your flight from Lithuania? You know, you got the Sugihara visa, and then how about the Soviet exit visa, and then did you take the Trans-Siberian Railroad?

Well, after we got the Sugihara visa, we were really quite delighted to have the transit visa. But then we had another problem. We needed to get an exit visa from the Russian authorities. And I remember like today. We went to the NKVD or KGB, whatever they call, my husband and I, applying for an exit visa.

And the officer says to us, exit visa, where are you going? So we didn't have a Curacao visa. We only had a transit visa. So we said, well, we're going through Japan, but eventually, we hope to get to the United States. And he says, how do you know you are going to get the United States? What do you mean, you're going to leave the country and you have no visa to go to any place?

So we said, well, listen, my husband says, when we get to Moscow, there is an American embassy there. Because there

was done in Kaunas. And I am sure that if I go there, the American ambassador will recognize my passport and my tourist visa. And I'm sure that I'm going to get an extension there.

So the officer said to us, OK. Leave the passport with me and I will check on it. If the American embassy or consulate is willing to give you an American visa, I will give you an exit visa. Well, there were no more unhappy and sad people who left this KGB office than Nathan and I. Because we knew that this was impossible, absolutely impossible. And here, we didn't even have our passport because they took our passport. And we didn't expect to hear from them.

And you know how things were being done in Russia at that time? Two weeks later, they called us in and they gave us our exit visa. Just like that. So then after we got our exit visa, and then we had to worry about transportation through Russia, where we didn't have enough money. We had very limited funds. And I think the Jewish Joint in the States had some money for the refugees to help them with their transportation. But not very much, very little.

And all the transport that was being done by one firm in Russia. So we went to Intourist bureau. So we went to this Intourist bureau, applying to get a ticket to go across Russia in this Trans-Siberian train. And we had to stop over in Moscow. And the fellow said, oh, sure, you can get it. And he says, it will be so much and so much money. About \$300 or more. And we didn't have the money.

And say, well, how come we still have to pay all this? And he said, because you have to eat in the restaurant wagon on the train and the meals are very expensive. We said to him, listen, we don't have to eat in this wagon. We're going to get some sausage with us, and we will get some tea on the way, and water, that's all we need. We'll bring our own bread.

No. You can not travel like that. You have to go, you have to have this. And you come back to me. And I will see if you can manage or not. And we came back to him, and we said again, the same, said, listen, we can't afford. It we can not do it. We just don't have the money to do it.

So he said to my husband, how much money do you have? And he says, I have \$100. And the fellow said to him, I tell you what, you give me \$50 and you keep for yourself \$50. And he gave us the tickets and we went across.

Wow. You were really lucky. OK. So let's see. Can you tell me what the trip was like on the Trans-Siberian Railroad? And try and look at me, you know.

Now then we were already very fortunate enough to find ourselves on this Trans-Siberian Railroad. We stopped in Moscow for two days and then we caught this train. And of course, we were not in first class. It was like the third class. There were many Russian people on the way. The trip lasted about 10 or 12 days.

And actually, we had no problems on it. Nobody bothered us. And we just stopped in different places and we maybe get some tea or chai, what they call in Russian. But we were actually very uneventful trip. And we just had our food what we brought with us, which we ate until we got to Vladivostok.

And when we got to Vladivostok, the city was in the evening, and the city was all blacked out. And they wouldn't let us off the train until they provided with some buses to take us directly to the port of Vladivostok. And from there, we boarded a boat for Tsuruga, Japan.

Was this your honeymoon?

You know, we didn't even think of honeymoons at that time. So you know, it's a completely different-- I mean, you are young, you don't take it as seriously as-- you know, I didn't know what was happening in my family. And I was young, and I was in love, and I was with my husband, and I was quite happy because I wasn't by myself, you know, I was very fortunate.

Was it a steam engine train? And did it take a long time? Where did you sleep? What did you eat?

Well, the trip took from Moscow about 10 days. 10 or 12 days, I don't remember correctly. And we had the food which

we took along with us, you know. The sausages, some bread, and we getting tea on the way, and things like that. And sometimes, we got off the station. But we were very afraid to get off the train.

Because the train would just leave without-- some people were left behind because the train didn't give you any notice when it is leaving. After all, it was kind of wartime, so it wasn't so regular. The trains in Russia were never regular.

And as I say, and of course, we slept on hard benches, because we were not in a sleeping car or anything like that. But the trip itself was, I would say, very uneventful.

Could you cut for a second? Could you?

OK, rolling.

Turning over.

So when you got to Vladivostok, did you see the city, or did they take you right to the boat? And what were the boat conditions like? What was the trip across the sea to? And what did you expect when you got to Japan? I mean, you were a young girl.

So finally, we got to Vladivostok. And the city was all blacked out. I guess it was the war precaution. And they never let us off the train. They'd let us off until the proper buses came to the train, took us on this bus, and the bus directly took us to the port to board the ship which took us to Tsuruga, a port in Japan. It was a freighter.

And of course, our accommodation was the lowest class on this freighter. And at that time, the people who are on the freighter, they were not used to see white people being in the lower classes. Because white people were always traveling in luxury accommodations. And I remember so exactly that it was a very stormy sea.

And I am not a very good traveler when it comes to all travel on a sea. And I got extremely seasick. So I would say that for two days, until we got to Tsuruga, I was very, very sick. And I really could not have cared if I live or die. I just didn't care about anything.

And when we landed in Tsuruga, I was just like a zombie after this sickness on this boat. And here we are, we come to Tsuruga. It was a beautiful-- this I remember exactly. It was a beautiful day. It was in January. The cherry trees were started to bloom. Was sky was blue. And everything was so colorful in my eyes. And here, I see the Japanese people, which I have never seen before walking down the street in those kimonos, in those special shoes what they are wearing.

I was excited. It was something so fantastic. I could never believe that here I am in Japan. Who could believe a girl from Warsaw all the way to Japan in my wildest imagination? So it was very exciting in this moment.

And from Japan, they took us by a train to Kobe. And when we got to Kobe, we did not have to look for any accommodation. Because Joined provided houses for all those refugees who are coming through Russia to Japan. And so we were living in one house, and used to be called Home. And Jewish is Haim. And we used to call them Haims. Now, this home was probably about 28 or 30 people were living in one house. And we--

I'm sorry, we have an airplane.

Outside going through. It's not such an easy job.

No, it's not easy at all.

My goodness, they have to repeat and repeat.

So why don't you take me of landing in Tsuruga again.

OK. I remember, when we landed in Tsuruga, it was a beautiful day. Sun was shining, the sky was blue. Those colorful Japanese ladies in beautiful, colorful kimonos walking down the street. Actually, like making those funny noises with their wooden shoes. It was exciting. And having those babies on the backs, which I never saw before. It was very, very excited. And we were just wondering. I mean, you know, it was something out of this world.

And by train, there were some people from the Jewish Community Center in Kobe. And they took us to Kobe. And in Kobe, that allotted us to a house, which was called like a home, a Haim. And about 28 refugees were living in one house.

The house had a few rooms. We were all sleeping on the floor. There were about 10 or 12 to each room. We were sleeping on those mats. But not because the Japanese people were mistreating us, but it was the custom of the country. And we didn't have, let's say, a shower or a bathtub in our-- in the home which we lived. But we had like a little water, like a sink, and so on, and toilets. And then we have like hibachis, which we are cooking on.

But next door to it was a bath house. About a house away, and for very few cents, like \$0.10, which was like one American penny at the time, you could have your bath, and you could have your shower. And it was another experience. Because here, we saw all those Japanese people in those really hot tubs and everything like this. And it was very, very unusual.

And being in Kobe and living in this home, here we were. We were a bunch of young people. We were all-- there was nobody over the age of 30 in this place. And at first, to all of us, it was really something of an experience. So we started to go out. And because we were not forbidden. We could go anyplace we wanted to go in Kobe. And the Japanese people were just staring at us because this mass of these white people all of a sudden invading their city.

And we went to different places, you know, in Kobe, to those red districts and here and there. It was quite an experience. We sometimes would go to a restaurant and have some coffee or something. And we were always so amazed at the way the Japanese women were treating the men when they came in. So it was really quite exciting when we were there.

But of course, we didn't fully appreciate all this because we were still worrying. We were worrying about our families which were left behind. We were worrying about our future. We knew that we had only a transit visa, which actually let you stay in the country for four weeks. But through the graciousness of the Japanese government, we were allowed to stay just about six months.

And so we were very uneasy. With all this, we were very, very uneasy. We wanted to get out. We knew that we can not stay there. And I was very fortunate that my husband, who is very persistent, he was traveling all the time to Tokyo, where all the embassies were located, trying to find for us a place of refuge, which was not very easy at that particular time.

How did you finally get a visit to get out?

Well, my husband was going constantly to Tokyo. And while he was in Tokyo, he joined-- there was a group of engineers. He was an agricultural engineer. The professional people that there was a group of them. And they formed kind of an organization. And they had some connections with the maybe Polish embassy and so on.

And my husband found out that the Polish embassy had 20-some visas for professional people to go to Canada. Since he was a professional people, so he was one of them who was provided, was going to be provided with a visa to Canada. But they had only one visa only for him, not for his wife. So of course, he says, well I am not going unless I can get a visa for my wife also.

And at that time, he phoned me, to Kobe, and he said, you-- or no, he didn't actually. Cable. He cabled to Kobe, he cabled. Because there was no phone like it is right now. And we didn't have one in our home. And urging me to come immediately to Tokyo because there is a possibility that if I get there and we go together, maybe we will be able to get another visa.

And that's what happened. I left immediately without taking anything and I joined Nathan. And somehow, we did get another visa for me. And then I had about 24 hours to return to Kobe, and to collect the few things what we had, and to board a boat for Canada. Because the boat was leaving the following day.

How was your journey on the boat to Canada?

Well, again, I was very sick.

So start it with--

Oh, I shouldn't say that.

OK. That's all right.

The journey to Canada was on a boat called Hiamaru. And this boat also was a freighter. We didn't have the best accommodation. But I'm a very poor traveler on boats. And I was very sick. And as much as we were hungry. And they had really some delicious food in the dining room. I just couldn't. I didn't want to eat anything. My husband was pushing me up on the deck. But I, again, I couldn't care less if I live or die, I can tell you. Because I was sick for 12 days until we got.

There we got to Seattle, which I will never forget. Because our boat landed in Seattle. And to being from Warsaw and United States, that was heaven. This most democratic country in the world. And here we are in Seattle.

It was just such an unbelievable joy and exuberance to see those people, the Americans, working. The way they were directing those boats with their little fingers, how to unload a boat. It was amazing. And we stayed there until they unloaded the boat in the States, in Seattle. And from there, they took us to Vancouver. The same board came to Vancouver.

Great. Good. Let's see. What were you able to take with you on this whole journey? Starting when you left Warsaw. What did you take with you?

When I left Warsaw-- you see the point is like, he's typing, let him not type right now, I just want to tell you something.

No, tell me, tell me, go ahead.

I just want to tell you something. Because you see, when I left Warsaw, I told you my sister-in-law also left. I told you before, but we didn't put that in this story. Anyhow, she was-- I took two dresses. But I had to give her one because his things were all stolen. So I was left with one of everything, whatever I had. Anyhow, now, I will go.

OK, go ahead.

OK. When I left Warsaw, I took a knapsack. And I had a pair of ski boots, and I had one dress, some underwear, that's about it, a comb. I didn't have anything else. I just had my father's belt around my waist. I didn't have any photographs. I even had a ring. I didn't take my watch along. I didn't take a ring along. I was so sure that I'm going to go back. I only had \$4 American and I had about 100 Polish zlotys. That's what I had. Very few things.

First of all, it would too heavy to be walking across and carrying a heavy knapsack, you know, across the border. So that's all I had.

And then when we get to Lithuania, we had to buy a pillow. You know, and in the old country, when they had a pillow, was one big square. Not like two pillows what you got in this country, but there was one, big pillow. So we had to. We bought a pillow. So we had this one big pillow. And what I'm taking with me, this pillow never left us. Would you believe it?

We took this pillow all the way to Japan. We landed in Vancouver with this pillow. And then years later, it was a down pillow, or feathers. We went to a place and they divided this pillow, and they made two pillows out of it.

And those two pillows, we had for a long time. Then finally, we changed. And when my daughter bought a summer home, we gave her those two pillows. I think those two pillows are still in her summer home.

OK. That's a great story. I love it.

What role do you think luck played in your survival?

Oh, I would say 90%.

Can you give me a complete?

Oh, I forgot. Sorry. I think that I was a very lucky person because many people who escaped by themselves, they didn't have anybody, they were just by themselves. Even though I left home and I was always very much doted on by my family, because I came from a quite well-to-do home. I was never by myself. Because the minute I left, then I joined my husband. And I was very fortunate because I always had my husband by my side. I mean, if we suffered, we suffer together.

And I think that I was just about the luckiest person. I consider myself very lucky despite all this, because I always-- we always had each other, which very few people could say that through the war.

And of course, when we came to Canada, the war was still on. That was 1941. And my husband joined the Canadian Army. And he actually did not have to join the Canadian Army. Because he couldn't get a job in his profession. It was very hard to get a job.

So he got a very hard job working in a factory, where they were carrying animals on his back, you know, something like beef in a packing house. He gets a job for a short time. He was working there for about 10 months or a year. And while he was there, he went to school. Since the war was on, to learn to work on a lathe. And he was to make tools. So after, he left his job and he got a job with Boeing, which had also a place here in Vancouver. And he worked there. So that was the essential industry.

But that was like '43. And he did not have to go to the Army. But he said to me, I have to join the Army-- because she could be exempt working in an essential industry. But he said, look, after the war, how would I feel? Here I am, a young man, and our people are suffering. I can not even talk about, makes me cry. And our people suffer so much. And after the war, I never contributed anything. I just didn't do anything. So he joined the army.

And by that time, I had a little boy. So it was really very hard for me. But I never felt that it's hard for me. I truly never had felt that anything is hard for me. I really--