

Yeah, what is that?

Jets.

Jets.

Kennedy, Idlewild at the time when I came.

I'm sorry.

I took it out and then put it back.

Yeah, I took it out too. Thanks.

Irene, I wanted to go back and ask, do you recall from these procedures in the hospital, do you recall them making you sick or having side effects that were troublesome for you?

I can't say that I do. I do remember how--

It's all right.

I do that.

Hey, we get to do it again.

My God.

We have time and takes. It's not a problem.

I don't recall that any procedures that were done on me made me sick. Not positively. But I do know that I was in the hospital many times and I was quite ill with high fevers. Again, I don't know from what. I remember one time in the hospital when there was going to be some kind of an action and that usually meant that very many people from the hospital were taken straight to the gas chamber.

And I remember that there was a nurse there who shoved me under her skirt and just said, be very quiet. And I think I escaped an actual action to the gas chambers.

That's my phone.

Sorry.

C A T S. As opposed to K A T Z.

Are we rolling?

Because of that sound I'm going to have to ask you to--

Oh my God.

Just tell me that portion about how there was an action and that how the nurse took you under--

One day there was an action in the hospital when most of the patients were being sent out to the gas chamber. And I recall there was a nurse who just grabbed me and shoved me under her skirt and said, just be very quiet. And I think

that's how I was saved that day.

Did you have any close encounters as it were like that?

In the infirmary I had no close encounters that I recall. I was just taken, examined, done with whatever. Nothing seemed painful. I didn't spend any length of time there. And that was it pretty much.

So how did you-- how did you get out of Auschwitz? What happened?

Well, sometimes towards the end of the war in January of 1945 things suddenly changed in Auschwitz. It was no longer operating in the smooth fashion in which it had been. There was a lot of confusion and people running every which way and people even shouting that we're free. The Russians are coming. The Russians are coming. And I can't say that I really understood.

I did understand the joy that something good had happened. However, by that time I myself was quite ill and I had been just lying on the floor. I could not even get up at that point. And sometime before the Russians actually arrived, there was a lady who lived in the city of Auschwitz, a Polish lady who actually came into the camp, picked me up, put me on her shoulders and took me to her home.

And then what?

Well, I stayed with her for a while. And I was enrolled in Catholic school. And I became a Polish little Catholic girl. Until the Jewish-- I can't recall the name now but there was a Jewish organization at that time that was seeking to rescue children from non-Jewish homes. And I was taken from her and put into an orphanage in France.

How did-- I'm curious that you were-- that this woman chose you. That she came and she chose you. I'm sure you wouldn't have known at the time. You were probably just-- this woman came and kind of-- do you have any sense of why you or how that happened or?

Not at all. I don't know. I have no idea.

What about you Rene? What happened? How did you come to leave Auschwitz? What were the circumstances?

Well, towards the end of our stay in Auschwitz, my stay in in Auschwitz, things changed somewhat in the camp atmosphere. There were more air raids I recall. Because during air raids we all had to go inside the barracks. We heard the drone of the aircraft. And there was always a soldier placed outside our barrack, for what reason I don't know. Then there was a general sort of lax feeling we got, I got from the soldiers. They weren't always around there in as many numbers. And then all of a sudden at one point we were asked to line up or to congregate.

And I think they were going to load us, that's my thoughts, they were going to load us onto a truck. And we were going to be taken to gas chambers. I remember the feeling, because it was probably the first time I really felt fear, an instinctive fear, like an animal knows when it's going to die. There's something about this action that was terrified me. And we were lined up. We were getting-- started to load the truck, and the gates of our camp, our area, opened up.

And this green convertible pulled in with high ranking officers I imagine. I do recall seeing the boots more than the hats. But whoever it was-- and I think I heard later that might have been Mengele stopped this whole thing from happening. It was at the very end when we were finally released or taken out of the camp we were still marched out by German soldiers through the night. It was a very cold night and we had to keep marching.

Anybody that stopped or fell out of line was shot and that was it. We just kept going. That was my-- I should mention that all of a sudden, while we were on the march, there was gunfire in the back, artillery, it was rumbling in the back. All of a sudden the Germans, guards all around, disappeared. They were gone. They're just not there. And a very short time later, Russians all around us on horses. Russian. Loud. And they marched us into an area where there were some food stores. And it was pretty chaotic.

What happened when you saw food?

Well, everybody ran for it. I didn't know what I saw. I just knew that this was good stuff to get. And I was so little I got pushed aside. And when I finally got there all I got is a can. A gold colored can. It looked huge to me. I don't know how big it really was. When we opened it, it was sauerkraut. I remember that very distinctly.

But I think a lot of people got themselves very ill and died as a result of overeating, eating on such empty stomachs.

Did you eat the sauerkraut?

I just smelled it. I wasn't into it. No.

Good thing.

Yeah, probably.

I can't imagine sauerkraut of of all things.

And then what happened to you?

I was taken to a hospital first. Because apparently I had something not exactly right with me. And then to an orphanage in Czechoslovakia. In a town called Kosice. That's sort of the end of. But as we were sitting here and talking, I was wondering. We didn't mention at all, and I don't recall when this really happened when our numbers were put on. They were put on in Auschwitz I'm pretty sure. But I don't recall at what point this happened at all. I do remember the pricks. I remember all that, but I don't recall when. It's like totally--

Irene, do you remember? Do you recall when?

I can't say actually. But I think it was when we first arrived.

I believe Irene. She says that we got the numbers when we first arrived.

But you ended up in Israel, correct?

No. I did not end up in Israel. I was in Czechoslovakia. And I was taken out of the orphanage by a family and then another family. I went to school there till I left Czechoslovakia in 1949. So I went to public school there and.

Now, did you, again, you were still-- you had seen each other only once. What was your feeling? And I'm going to ask you this as well. What was your feeling about-- Well let me ask you this way. Did you think about your sister? Were you-- what were your thoughts about your sister?

She was constantly-- my reaction to any adversity, any bad things that happened I said I have to live through this, I have to go through this, I have to do it. It's for Irene. So she was constantly-- and I knew that she-- I believed and I knew that she was alive. Otherwise I couldn't have gone on with this. But that's-- always.

And even as years passed and you still didn't know where she was you still had faith?

Absolutely. I had faith all the way through until we made first contact which was I think by mail in 1948. Yeah.

Could you say that again and finish the sentence that you had faith that--

Yeah, I always had faith and knew that she was alive even though we had no contact. And we did have contact at first in 1948 I think through mail. But I always knew that she was there. And was she was always my support.

What about you Irene? Did you have similar feelings? Were your feelings different? What did you feel about your brother? Because you were going through all this post-war--

I knew that he was out there and that he was alive. I did not have any idea where. But I also, in my heart, I knew that someday we would be together. I didn't know quite how. But I also-- the need to make sure that he was OK got me through a lot of things too.

Did you ever despair that maybe he wasn't or was it solid, positive faith that you knew he was out there? Did you ever just--

Totally solid faith that he was out there.

I have to concur with Irene that constant-- constantly new always never a doubt that this was going to be OK because she was out there and we were going to-- I wasn't quite sure about being reunited or when I guess was the big question. But I always knew she was there.

Irene, can you tell me about how you came to be in this country?

When I was in the orphanage in Fublaines which small town outside of Paris, I was chosen by Mr Herbert Tenzer who at that time headed an organization called Rescue Children whose main purpose was to help children and reunite children with parents or possibly find them homes here in the States or bring them to Israel just to help war orphans.

And he selected me to come here to represent the war orphans to raise money for this endeavor. And that's how I came to America. I think he chose me not because I was anything special. I think I just had very long hair. I think he liked my long curly hair.

And then how did you come to be with Slotkin's?

Well, for a while when Mr Tenzer first chose me he promised me that I could go back because I didn't really want to come to America. I had a very dear friend in the orphanage and she was going to Israel and I wanted to go with her. However, what you don't tell little children is you promise them anything and then you do what you want. And so once he got me here to the States he never ever intended to send me back. And he did seek out some people who were willing to adopt. And he found this family, the Slotkin's and that's how I stayed here. And that's how Rene came, because--

OK, hold on one second. How much time do we have?

About 20.

we have 15.

Cut for a second.

But are we rolling? If you can tell me how you found him.

The way I found Rene is a very long story in itself. But it starts with a photo shoot for Life magazine when I and another boy had been selected to come here to raise funds for the European War Orphans. And at that time Dr. Kalina, the doctor that Rene had been living with in Czechoslovakia, this was already in 1948-- Actually, the Life magazine was November 1947. But this Dr. Kalina had been forced to flee Czechoslovakia because the communists were overtaking it.

It was going behind the Iron Curtain and he fled to Israel. And one day he was I guess in a stationery store and he picked up Life magazine and he opened to the page with me on it and he recognized the name Guttman and he realized right then that I must be Rene's twin sister. And that's how we first made contact.

Could you tell me that story again, and this time give me a little prologue that explains that you and Rene had been separated because of the war and then tell the story about how the photo shoot got you back together?

OK. I'm not a professional actress. Does this mean I get a bigger fee?

Yeah.

Just have her tell the truth. Not acting. Just tell like it is. Tell it like life is.

Well, Rene and I, from the time we were separated in Auschwitz, even when the war was over we continued our separate ways. Rene went to Czechoslovakia and I went to Poland for a while and then to France where I was selected to represent the War Orphans of Europe and I was brought here to America by an organization called Rescue Children.

When I got to America it was a very big story because we also went to see President Truman and Life magazine did a three page spread on our coming here. And it was Life magazine that eventually would prove to be the bond, the little miracle that brought Rene and I together again. Because at that time, Life magazine was done in November 1947 and by this time Dr. Kalina, the man that Rene was staying with, had to flee Czechoslovakia because it was going behind the Iron Curtain.

He fled to Israel, and by some sheer luck he picked up Life magazine in 1948 and he saw the picture of me, saw the name, and made the connection that I must be Rene's twin sister. And that started the ball rolling to getting us reunited which didn't happen for another two years. But we made contact.

Great. Great.

You can work on your question.

This is a hard question to ask, let alone answer I guess. But what effect did the experience of the war have when you were growing up in America?

How the war affected my growing up in America is a huge, huge question. I wonder if we could be a little bit more specific about some of it.

Well I mean, did you-- I guess I've always wondered, how do you reconcile what you went through? And then finally getting here and growing up at a quote unquote fairly normal time in America? How did you incorporate one experience with the other?

The only way I can answer it is, know how the war affected my whole life. As a very young child in Auschwitz and Theresienstadt, as we discussed before, I didn't realize the horror of the whole thing and the emotional toll it would have taken on me had I not been a child. So everything was just going along and I didn't know any different. I didn't know.

I knew that I didn't have a mother and a father, but what it really meant I really couldn't put it in. I know this, that the Slotkin family, Meyer and Dinah Slotkin, did everything they possibly could. And I saw all other parents doing for their kids so I felt I was loved. I was part of their family and I had to grow up just like everybody else, which I did. I'm not sure that I did it in the same way that other kids do it, but I don't think any two kids grow up the same way.

What the war did was I knew in the back of my mind that I was an orphan, and I knew that they were not my real parents, real meaning biological parents, even though everything else they seemed to be covering. This led me to question sometimes, do I owe them less or more than the norm, whatever the norm is? And I could never really answer that question. There's just no way of doing it. All I know is that they deserve a huge amount of credit for adopting us, especially me when they didn't even see me or know me and they spared nothing to get me reunited with their Irene. Which was their Irene at that point.

And I was 12 years old coming from questionable background for sure. But they spared nothing. And they loved me 100%. They also were very active in keeping the war experience away from us. All the years, all our teenage years they really put up a real fence. So any inquiries that were made about the war, about us or people wanted to make directly to us, they wouldn't allow it. They just felt that they had to protect us from this. So in that sense, we were like in the dark about-- it wasn't talked about.

Irene, what was it like when you finally got together after all those years?

It was, after finally seeing Rene for the first time after all those years, in some ways it was anticlimactic. Because instead of running into each other's arms, which with the music playing and all that, we just kind of looked at each other and we just stared at each other. We didn't even know what to say to each other. But I think that we-- inside we knew we had finally made it full circle and that we were now together forever. But it wasn't all the hoopla that you would imagine.

Absolutely, the same thing. We were reunited at a great distance. What I recall is the sidewalk in front of our house. I think that's where you came out or something like that. And we were like just looking at each other. No words were spoken. No words were spoken. And I have to add, at this point, in terms of words spoken about our experiences. We never talked about it even though we lived in that same house. We never, ever talked about it. And I'm not just talking about a few years. A few decades. We have never talked about it.

Was it, over time did you sort of-- I assume, because it's happening now, but did it take very long, do you think, for you to re-- you say your bond in a way got you through these experiences. Did it take long for you to really re-establish the bond?

I think it did. I think there was so much going on in the beginning, for both of us in different ways. Rene having to make a tremendous adjustment to American life. I had already been here for two years, so I was already speaking a good English. I was a good student. And Rene had a tough act to follow because parents can't help comparing children. And Rene was just not as studious as me which was fine. But it made it very tough for me.

When you first asked us how the war experience affected our life here I really didn't get a chance to say anything. But I'm going to jump in now.

Let me just take this.

And we're going to change tape.