

We need to, I later can.

Did word ever get back to the rest of you though?

You know, there are so many that were on the mail. You could, once in a great while, you got a postcard or whatever. And one woman once told me, you know, that this one that went three months ago wrote me we are here, and we even met some family members that were dead 20 years. You know? So in this way they wanted us to know that people that go there are, you know, are dead, or most of them, rather.

Listen. My brother came here. My brother, my oldest brother went with the last transport. He was a major in the reserves in Prague. He was a horseman. He had a horse, which he rode every day. He was terrific, healthy. But that didn't make any difference. They came out and they said, to the left, to the right, to the left, to the right.

If you were lucky, you went to the left and didn't go into the gas chamber. If you are unlucky, you went to the right, on the other thing, to the gas chamber.

Was it strictly chance or--

Chance.

How did they--

It must've been chance because my brother was in such good health and condition. He was only 46.

Were there other family members? Did you have other family members at that camp?

Oh, yeah. I mean there are a lot of-- in October, November 1944, there was an emptying out of TerezÃn. There were 10,000 people then. And my uncles, my aunts, my cousins, my niece, my-- even she got married. He died in Dachau. You know some men couldn't make it.

She lived through it, except that she got typhoid in Bergen-Belsen. And everybody died except my sister-in-law and the three cousins from my mother's side that's living in San Francisco and two cousins from my father's side that went to live in Australia after the war.

And one brother?

My brother, Karel, was here already. He was living in Vienna. And when he's lucky, he got himself out. His wife took a post in London as a cook. There were six weeks where you could pack a suitcase, if it was in Prague, to only go to London. That Hitler did.

Why didn't more people do that?

I don't know. I wanted to do it, and my sister-in-law was kind of-- I don't know. She did want the family together. I mean, my brother-- my brother wanted to sell the business and go to wherever. He had enough money-- to South America. My sister-in-law didn't want to. So she lived through it, and my brother and his daughter and his son-in-law, they all perished.

You know, then in 1944, about 10,000, 15,000 people, they all went to Auschwitz. Most of them went into the gas chamber because they thought it is guy, Berman. He is still singing in Prague. And then there is Zadikowa. She calls me once in a while. There are just a few.

So you do. You still keep in touch with a few.

Yeah. Since the book came out, they all of a sudden, the one that lived through it knows about. There I am, so they called me and they wrote me. But after it was emptied out completely, then there was hardly anything. I mean, I remember they had to go to a so-called glimmer factory. You know? Where they-- and glimmer was an insulation for ovens or for whatever.

And I had to get up at 4:00 in the morning because it started at 6:00. But I always had to do-- I wanted to be clean. And every morning I went through the yard. There was a faucet, was probably a horse-- a horse-- what do you call it?

Like a horse trough?

Yeah.

For them to drink water.

Yeah. And it was ice cold, winter and summer. And I always had a piece of soap. Yeah, I gave voice lessons there. They brought me bread. And I said I want soap. I want soap. And I washed myself from head to toe every day.

And, yeah, I had no idea there were these barracks in which they were standing maybe for 100 years or 50 or 60 years. And when all the bedbugs came out, you have no idea. There were bedbugs, and then there were fleas, so many fleas. And it was terrible.

Did they give you clothes to wear?

Why? I mean, I bought what I had. But I brought. And then later you could get-- they took from the people that came after me. They took everything. And you could get there and said I need a dress. There were enough dresses. You know, people took their best. And I could keep my dresses. But the people that came after me couldn't. So I got there a dress to put on and sing in it.

I was there 3 and 1/2 years. Oh, there was nothing, nothing. Then one day they-- one day there were two women that came and went through your belongings. And they found a 20 crown banknote in my belongings, so I had to go to the prison there.

Why?

Why? Because I wasn't supposed to have any money on me. So I went to the prison. I was there three or four weeks.

What did they do in the prison? How were you treated there?

You know, it is the door that slams behind me could only be opened from the outside, and that is a terrible feeling. You cannot get out.

Were you there by yourself?

No, there were three-- we were four there. There were some bunks, just on-- And I, because I had the \$20 on me-- there was bucket in the middle, and that was where you went. You know, there was no toilet there.

And then the next day, we had to go to the delousing station. And then at 9 o'clock in the morning, we had to march to the entlausung station. There we had to take all our clothes off. And there we were all naked and standing around till 6 o'clock in the afternoon. And they took some lime soap, and they washed us. And I don't know. and then they-- we had to be inspected. We went back.

And the next day, a barber came and said we have to shear your hair. And one came. And you know, I had all this lovely hair. You can see on the photograph. So he took a [INAUDIBLE] over. He left me just a little bit in there. And otherwise he shaved my whole head of hair off.

Why did they do that? What did they do with the hair?

I don't know. That was [? the order. ?] The Nazis ordered it. Because I was in the-- I was there in the prison. Everybody that was in prison had. Listen--

They did that only to the prisoners then?

Yeah.

OK. Not everyone in the camps.

No. But when you went to Auschwitz, there they shored you complete. He left me a little bit here. And everything here was shorn off. And after I was back, and I applied for the Wiedergutmachung, for the pension from Germany for people that were in concentration camps, you know.

I went to a psychiatrist, and he told me to shear off the hair of a woman is like a rapist because this is the crown. Your hair is like the-- you know? But I thought without it, you are nothing or something. He said it is like rape.

And there was this gendarme next to me, and I cried, and I cried, and I cried, and I could not stop crying. I never cried. I was frozen. But this was such an offense to me, you know? And he said don't cry. It will grow again. Don't cry. And he broke down also.

So for a year or longer, I went around with a turban because how can you go? After three weeks they released me. I didn't have any interrogation, you know? And I was sure now when I was in the prison, I surely will be in the next transport.

Then I got scarlet fever there. And then I got pneumonia there. And then everybody was gone. Yeah, and then we had to go into the glimmer factory. And they'd do something for insulation. The Germans needed it for their ammunition or for whatever. So I got up at 4:00 in the morning. And I spent eight hour there. And you could not talk there.

The Nazis went up and down the aisles, seeing if you are doing your job. And then we walked back again under guard. And we got a meal. And I changed, and I sang a concert for whatever Jews were left there.

And for the officers?

Yeah. Oh, listen. One time I was preparing for a concert, and there was only two or three pianos in the whole place. And I was singing some Schubert or some Brahms. And all of a sudden, the mayor came with two Nazi officers. And they said, what is he doing here? And he said, she is preparing for a concert.

She's a singer? Yeah. So he said, OK. Sing something for us. So I sang-- I don't know what it was, a Brahms song. But I never sang so wonderful in my whole life, like for a--

A command performance.

For the two Nazis, to show them what a Jew can do. You know? Very good. Very good, he said. Go ahead and went to the-- those are things that come to my mind.

So about March or April 1945, there were hardly any singers left, except I was there and Hammerstein, the bass from the National Opera in Prague. And he said we have to put something together. Why don't we make a children's opera or something because there were a lot of children there without their parents there, and often the children were still there.

So we got costumes for them. And it was kind of a-- there were the bees and the birds. And they're jumping around on stage. And in the background was Hammerstein and I. And I and he, we sang some Czech folk songs. And there were

hardly any musicians left either. They all went to Auschwitz in October-November 1944.

And it was the beginning of April. And we got the message that the Red Cross from Switzerland will come and visit us, and we should put on this children's opera. So we were standing there, and we put on this opera. And then in the-- I was in the wings, of course. And so was Hammerstein. And these people from Switzerland came into the wings. From there were also the Nazis with them.

And I wanted to tell him that this is all only pretense. And he looked at me and said, I know. We know everything. We know everything. Pretty soon it will be over, he whispered to me. And I said, really? Maybe the war is going to be at an end.

But was maybe the end of March or beginning of April. And in May, like you know, '45, the war was over. So we were waiting for the English or for the Americans to liberate us. But we had to wait. Maybe four or five days we were without anybody.

All of a sudden, the Nazis burned all the papers that they had in Terezáň. And it was like black snow falling from the sky. And then they had a train for themselves, and they took off, the Nazis. And nobody was there. We were in limbo maybe for four-- on the 4th or 5th of May.

So the inmates were just left at the camp?

The inmates were left at the camp. Yeah. Before that happens, they came, the transports, the death transport. You know, when Hitler knew that it was over, so they didn't know what to do with all the people that were still in the camps. So they put them on trains, and they drove, and they drove, and they finished up in Terezáň, in Theresienstadt.

And we went there, and the train stopped. And that was the first time I cried because there were men. Half of them were carried out on stretchers dead because for eight days, they didn't have any food, any water. They were just driven around. And then they were dropped off in Terezáň.

Some of them, you know, they stretched out their hands so that whatever we had, a piece of bread, we gave them. Then they told us we shouldn't have done it because if the body is so starved and emaciated, the food, they cannot come to digest the food. So most of them died. And I saw them all in the striped prison garb. That was the first time that I broke down and cried. Until then, I was laughing, couldn't even catch me.

Then the ones that were alive were herded together. And they wanted them to go entlausung I mean, we didn't have any gas chamber. And when they were pushed toward the building, they didn't want to go in because they thought that it's a gas chamber. So the fire department had to come-- I mean, the Jewish fire department-- and sprinkle them with the hose, with the-- you know so that they went in. So they were entlausung. And then they were--

It was May, or beginning of May, so it was warm already. So they were put down some place on a meadow. And somebody told me, there is a man with the name of [NON-ENGLISH]. He asked if you are still here. He would like to see you.

So I went there on the plaza. A cousin by marriage, a cousin of my sister-in-law, first cousin, and he went through the whole transport. He was sitting around eating grass. And he said he made it here. He made it through the whole Auschwitz and survived. So I went home, and I had some barley. So I cooked some barley. We put some sugar in there and took it to him. And he said that is the first good food that I had in eight days. So that's when I actually finally broke down and cried.

And then a few days later, the Russians came and liberated us. We had to wait for them. But my brother, who was in the Jewish-- what do you call it-- community center or whatever, had a very good friend there, who was married to a Gentile woman. And the moment they heard that the war is over, this woman came and had made out some-- a big sheet of paper with a lot of stamps on it, like they give you a stamp when you enter a country-- with a lot of stamps.

And there are Russian soldiers everywhere. And she always showed this paper with the many stamps on it. And they thought it's an official paper, so they let her pass with [INAUDIBLE]. She came to Terezín and picked me up, and my sister-in-law. That's how I spent-- I got out from Theresienstadt before it was quarantined. Because due to the fact that they were so many that were on the death march, there was an outbreak of typhoid. And Theresienstadt was quarantined till the end of September.

Otherwise you would have been there you would have been there three or four more months.

Two or three, four months. So then when I drove out from there, I couldn't believe that I am free. So I went back to Prague. And a good friend of mine put me up in her house. And so I was at this friend of mine maybe for a week. And then I got this apartment. They gave it to me.

And when I walked into the apartment, it was full of the most gorgeous pictures. These two German women worked for the Nazis there. And everything that the Jews left behind, they just took and hang it on the walls. And there was a big carpet in the middle of the room. They had-- and that was covered with me. So I covered it, and they are handmade rugs, all with swastikas. That's where a mother and daughter were living there, German, real Germans that worked for the Nazis.

So then I was in this apartment, and I-- there were seven pupils, voice pupils waiting for me because when I left, I had made a terrific turnaround. We was engaged at the National Czech Opera there. So everybody wanted me to make him a voice. And one guy came and said, I want you to make me a high C.

[LAUGHTER]

So anyhow, I settled down into this place. And I got a piano, a grand piano that I had before. So I was there maybe for from 1945 till 1948. And then the communists came and took over. First, we were supposed to be supported by the Americans with the Marshall Plan, but it didn't come to pass.

And then one day, all of a sudden, the communists were there. And my friends and my sister-in-law waited for her husband, who never came, my older brother Willy. And we didn't know until maybe many years later that he died in Auschwitz. So--

How did you find out what happened to your family?

To my family? Why, there was the Aufbau, it's a German newspaper that appears every week or every month in New York. And my brother read that I had [INAUDIBLE] my maybe survived that concentration camp. But nothing about Willy. So we really didn't know. I only know that the last transport was supposed to go to Terezín. And as it turned out, everybody had become-- what happened to them?

And many, many years later, we found out. There is a museum in Jerusalem, where there are all the names that died, all the Jews. And there was a suitcase that had a-- a black leather suitcase the name Wilhelm Graab on it. And that was the name of my brother. And my half brother that lived in Tel Aviv sent us a photograph of this. So we knew that my brother really was probably gassed in Auschwitz.

And last year, a good friend of mine went to Prague and went there Judische Kultusgemeinde. And they showed him the two cards, Hedda Graab Kemmayr. Went on this day and came back on this day. And Wilhelm Graab went on October the 27, and went east. That was all. So that means he probably went to Auschwitz.

That's what going east meant?

Yeah, sure. Yeah. So that is the history of my family. So then I was in Prague and my 25 pupils. And I had a concert there with approximately I had a-- I had a poster there too. And they told me, your father lives in Tel Aviv. You should go there. The communists, as long as you are known, you can take your piano with you probably. So I did. I took my grand piano with me.

How much later was this?

That happened in November '48. I flew to Tel Aviv. And there was my father with-- his second wife died-- with his son Viktor. And my father had a business there. So I was there, and then I sang the concerts, as you can see in Tel Aviv and in Jerusalem and then Haifa and in a kibbutz.

And then I met a man there that fell so madly in love with me because he knew that I have a brother in America. So he insisted that we get married. So I married him. But his name was not Evans. His name was Eschkenazy. And when we came up-- when we came here to-- I was there 18 months. When I came here to America, we landed in New York. And you had to give your passport to the officers there, and they call you by name.

And we are sitting there. And when somebody says Jack and Hedda "Ish-kan-e-zai." Ishkanezai? Oh, that must be us. That's how he pronounced Eschkenazy-- E-E-S-- E-S-H-S-- Esh-- K-E-N-- Keen-- A-B-I-- Eschkenazy. So I said, oh, that must be us because nobody got-- so we finally got there. Then I told him, we came here. My brother sent me a ticket, the flying-- the flying ticket I bought myself. I sold my grand piano to a kibbutz. And for the money, we could fly from Tel Aviv to New York.

So you and your husband both came to New York.

Yeah, we came. And--

What year was this?

That was in 1950, in August 1950. And then I-- then we took the train. Yeah, in New York, I had two very good friends that I knew from Prague. They took me out. And the first thing I wanted was Coca-Cola. I never had a Coca-Cola.

And then the next day we went on a train to Chicago. We had friends in Chicago-- from New York to Chicago. Chicago we were overnight-- and then to Denver. You know, by train, I mean. So--

How did you choose Denver?

My brother. My brother. My brother came, so I had-- when I was in TerezÃn, I didn't know is he alive, is he dead? I didn't hear from him. We didn't get any mail there. How could you get mail? You were-- you were completely isolated from everybody.

And Paul is still in Denver?

Paul is in Denver.

Do you see him often?

Huh?

Do you see him often?

Oh, yeah. He comes every weekend, reads me my mail and writes my checks. And he's a very, very good brother. So that's how I came in 1950 to Denver.

And you've lived in Denver since that time?

Since that time, yeah. I'm 89. I don't know why. My brain is young, but my parts are giving out.

And you'll be--

I will be 90.

You'll be 90 tomorrow.

I will be 90 next year. Yeah. So anyhow, I came to Denver. And somebody interviewed me, you know, but there is a singer that came from Israel. And there on the west side, they had a chorus of maybe-- I don't know how many people. \$10 a month it was in 1950. So I took the job, you know, and I organized chorus there. And we make appearances.

And then, of course, I couldn't sing. Denver didn't have an opera. And I knew the assistant conductor of the Metropolitan. But who wants a 51-year-old mezzo soprano that has been 3 and 1/2 years in a concentration camp? You know, I mean they had better, younger singers there.

So I started to give voice lessons. And then my brother, he was a public accountant, asked me if I want to come and work for him. So I said, yeah, sure. So I was married twice, and twice divorced. Never had any children. No, when my brother and I came here, I said nobody can pronounce the name Eschkenazy. Look in the phone book and pick a name that starts with E. So I looked, and there was Evans. And I said, this is easy to pronounce.

So when I got my citizenship, I asked if I can change my name to Evans. In 1956 I became an American citizen.

What about the opera company?

Yeah. So I had to rent a studio downtown. So I rented a studio for evenings. And I had a few pupils. And then somebody called me. There was a guy with the name-- what was his name? Lansing, Richard Lansing. He did a opera group there. And there were five, six, seven people that wanted badly to sing again.

So one called me one day and said, would you take over the people of Eric Lansing? I said, of course. So I got this group together and a few more pupils. And we started to put on these performances.

This was in 1956.

That was in 1955 or '56. And till 1963. This is a picture of my Denver opera company that I had in Denver from 1956 till 1963. There were all my pupils. And next to me is my brother, Dr. Paul Graves, who always introduced the excerpts or one act or duets or whatever we put on.

Now, tell me what you're doing now. I know you're still active,

And it's not-- I'm doing now. I work for my brother. Then my brother, when he was 65, sold his business, went back to school, like I tell you. And at the age of 77, he got his PhD in German. He wrote three books, which are all published. And my eyes got worse and worse. And then by then I got Wiedergutmachung, a pension from Germany for the people that were in concentration camps. You know? And I have Social Security, so I don't have to work anymore.

But I say-- and the pupils all-- you know, after a time nobody came anymore because they wanted to be together and sing opera. So I now, what I do here-- by the last few years, I make afghans. I make afghans because I can do this more by touch than by sight. And my afghans are all over the world. One is in Israel. One is in Canada. One is in Hungary. And so I do afghans. That's good for the mind, when you do something with your hands.

And in 1981 I was declared legally blind. I cannot read anymore. So I have the books for the blind. I have a tape recorder for the books for the blind on tapes. And I listen to books all the time because I was an avid reader. I had about 300 paperbacks, which I gave away. And now I'm also decrepit and blind and bent over. But I have a good brain and a very good memory.

What about theater? Are you still involved in the--

Yeah the reason I came here-- twice on Wednesday they greet the newcomers. So they're driving to the newcomers. When I came, they introduced us there. So I said I was this and that. I was an opera singer in Europe. I am a survivor of the Holocaust. I literally sang for my life in TerezÃn. And now I sold my house, and I'm here.

And then a woman came and said, listen. That is so interesting. You were on stage, and there we were, the Allied Players. Maybe you want to join them. I said, yeah. I am ready to do anything except singing because my voice I don't have anymore. So this is how it is now.

Now, when I told you that I was honored by the Holocaust-- Survivors of the Holocaust.

That was two years ago.

That was two years ago.

In 1986.

1986, yeah. I was 87. But I was not as blind as I am now. And I am very happy here because I don't have to do any cooking or freezing when I'm [INAUDIBLE]. In the morning, I make myself a cup of coffee and a toast. And at noon I make myself a soup or a salad and have a little sandwich. And in the evening, I go down-- like living in a luxury hotel, I go down and sit down, and I'm being served.

I want to live here.

You want to live here? So now I'm going away for two and a half months to Palm Springs.

Do you do this every winter?

Every winter, yeah. And then I have a lot of friends that come there every year. So it's like old homecoming. And I go swimming every day. Yeah, I swim. And I do my exercises, what they showed me in the rehabilitation center in the Rose Hospital.

And I am just a fighter. I am a survivor. And I'm not giving in. I don't give in.

Good for you, Hedda.

Good for me. Gosh, I really was something. [LAUGHS]