

Saw a soldier. And he stood on crutches. And with one crutch, he stood. And on the other, he beat a man on the floor. And the man was bleeding.

And I don't know what got into me because I never, ever talked to anybody. I never said nothing. I started to give him a lecture I got from my father. And I remembered them all. And when I told him, I had to know the-- I had to tell him the moral of the story. It was terrible, really terrible to listen to the lectures I got. So I gave him a lecture.

The soldier?

I gave the soldier a lecture. I said, how can you beat the man? He's bleeding. Do you know it's against the law. He said, that's not a man. That's a Jew. I said, who cares what it is? But that's against the law.

And all of a sudden, I hear a policemen say, OK, little girl, that's going to be enough. Let's go home. And you know, everybody in the ghetto, no matter how young you were-- because you weren't very young, because they killed the young people like somebody kills flies or whatever. I mean it was no big deal. So when he told me to go, I knew-- I knew-- I can't go to no Jew. And I can't go back to the-- because I know what's going to happen. The whole family, it's not only me but--

You can't say to the policeman, oh, I'm in the ghetto.

No. No, I can't. I couldn't even go near it. So I went to a house where I knew that-- I mean I didn't know, but I heard also my mother talked with her ladies that the people are so and so and whatever. So when she started to do with the keys-- I went there with the policeman, and I rang the bell, I said, mama-- I mean loud enough that she could hear me.

And this was somebody you didn't know.

No, I never saw, never-- to me she was a beautiful lady when she opened the door. She never spoke to the policeman. With the finger to me she said, how many times did I tell you? Home and homework.

I didn't know, should I answer or shouldn't I answer? I said if I don't answer, I'm better off. And I didn't answer it all. And she told me about three times that she told me to do the homework. And then she started to hit me right and left, right and left.

And at that point, I said, doesn't make a difference. My head is going fall down. And so I didn't do nothing. I just waited, you know. She was hitting me so badly.

And then I thought I heard in a dream the policemen say, take her in, stop hitting her. She will do the homework. And very slowly she took me in, and she wanted to know where I'm from. And I told her I'm from the ghetto.

And she gave me a hug. And she said, you know you'll have to go back. I was hoping that she will say you can stay with me, but she didn't. But she was the nicest person I have met after the priest because she never spoke to the policeman a word. So I mean, nobody could have accused her of saying that I am or I am not her daughter.

And she really saved my life. And her name, I never forgot. It was Mrs. Bokansha. And I forgot everything. And I also had a stroke once, and I really forgot everything. I forgot the name of the priesthood. I can't remember because I would have liked to remember it when I was in Israel. Anyway, I couldn't.

And then when that happened, maybe two days later, we got that we have to go to the concentration camp. And we all went. When we came there, they told my mother, this you put here, this you put there, whatever.

And my father thought he saw somebody, and he waved. As soon as he waved, a soldier came with a wooden thing. And I was on top of my father. And I got it. So in the morning when you come to our house you hear, ow, my back is killing me. But I couldn't have an operation because they said that nothing is going to help if I have an operation.

And then when I was there, I don't know what happened after. When I looked up, I thought I am in the ghetto. And I said, how can I be in the ghetto when we are supposed to be in Transnistria? And when I wanted to talk, I couldn't. Something was in my mouth.

And my mother's voice came on. And she said, we are here back because they didn't have enough cattle cars. Your father is all right. And you will be all right too. But one of your lungs is not all right. And the doctor doesn't have any medication. He is just going to try and do it as best as he can without the--

And this is from the beating that you got?

Yeah.

Yeah.

And he did whatever he did. I don't know. I think I took it. I couldn't yell anyway because I had something in my mouth.

And then after that, when we were home, my father asked my mother if she would please go to the priest and ask him, because he had asked me too if I want something. I said no, just that if you would pay the food. And then when he did that, I really couldn't ask for anything else.

And then my mother said that she will go. When she went, she asked him if he could please give her papers just for-- we were just the two girls. My sister was older than me and me-- if he could give her papers. And the priest said, if you would have brought the girls, I could have made them Greek Orthodox, he said. But so I can't give you that they were done anything because I can't do it if I don't have them.

My mother said they don't have to be, all right. And the priest was a very, very nice man. He gave her papers, which were not all right. And he gave her two crosses. And he said, I don't know for sure if I remember it correctly, that they do not cross themselves like the rest of the people. The rest is I think left to right, and they go right to left, you know.

And whenever we see a church or a cathedral, we have to cross ourselves. And we did it. And we went to Russia--

And this is just and your sister.

Just me and my sister.

You've now walked--

No, no, no, we just walked out.

Just walked out.

Walked out.

With a cross and false papers.

Yeah, with false paper. In Russia was bad.

So how did you get to Russia?

We went with the train. And I remember I was asleep or whatever. My sister didn't want me to be able to talk because my mouth goes too good. So she put me to sleep. I don't know what she did. And we came to Russia.

And, you know, my mother's tongue was really German because my mother was from Vienna. She was not from the

Czech Republic or Romania. So we were alone, we always spoke German. And we were walking in Russia, and we spoke German. And the policeman heard us and took us with him.

And when we went with him, my sister says, you will tell him the truth and the truth only. I said, how can I say anything? I have nothing but the paper, which are no good. And I have the cross. How can I tell him-- she says, the truth. You know who is the oldest? I said, yes, I do.

So I told him, when he asked me, I said, I'm really a Jewish girl who is running away from the Germans. And he put me in jail where my sister was. And we were there. When he left, my sister says, I have a razor blade in my shoe. And I would like you cut your veins, and I'll cut mine. And we'll make an end.

I said, I wouldn't do nothing to myself. Are you kidding me? I wouldn't do nothing. She said, then you will have to do what they will do to you. I said, who are the they? She said, they will kill us. They will not keep us here.

And then the policeman came in. And he said, what kind of holiday do you have now? I didn't know if it was March or April. I don't know what it was. I said-- I don't know if I or my sister said, it can be only one thing. Passover.

And he asked me, what did you do on Passover? I said, you had to ask four questions to your father. You have to-- I remembered only one. You see, I was not a great student. That I must admit. I was not great. And I remembered one.

So I said, [NON-ENGLISH]. And he said, that's all right. And he called my sister. And he said, you can go.

And I want to tell you we were really and truly so sad when the war was over and we didn't have any-- we just knew he was Jewish. But he saved our life. I mean really, he saved our life. people

Some people knew it, like Mrs. Bokansha, she knew she was saving my life.

Right.

But other people without knowing did us good. Like the Jew in the police. You know, I mean, he knew that we couldn't get out by ourselves. I mean, how could we get out? And the way he did it, he really saved our lives.

You know, I mean, you never could think even the way it was because everything was so bad. And it was so terrible. That things happen to you, which were really good, you didn't even see it.

And, Erika, he lets you out.

Yeah.

But now here, you and your sister are out in, I think, Kyiv.

Yeah.

So what did you do?

You see, we were sleeping in a place where it was maybe not quite as big as this room. And in this corner was a lady. And they said, you can have this corner. And after three weeks, they said you have to leave. And we called her the old lady. The old lady went with us. She didn't know where to go.

And we went to Katerynivka, which was like in Washington, outside Kyiv. It was--

Like a suburb or--

A suburb. So we were there. And there was a lady who was from Czechoslovakia. And she married the Russian. But he

was already dead. And she had a barrel of sauerkraut. And she would give us the sauerkraut. In Czechoslovakia, sauerkraut is something you make every day because it's very-- I don't like sauerkraut because--

It's not like bread.

--the whole year, or almost, we ate sauerkraut. And I had so much of the sauerkraut that-- I make it for my children. But I really don't like it. And it was really and truly very bad.

And then, what I have to tell you, when we were in Russia-- we were still in Russia-- one day the girl I was visiting her, I became friends with one of the nurses-- not nurses. Yeah, she was a nurse in the hospital. I worked I went to school. And I also had to work because it was the war. And one time I went there--

I'll stop you for a minute--

OK.

--Erika, before you continue. You and your sister are living in a house with what you were calling an old lady, who is probably, as you said now 40 or something.

Yeah, that's right.

But so you're living there together. But you're at the hospital. And you become friends with this woman Monica.

This woman, Monica.

OK.

And I was friends with her-- at that time, I was already 15. And she was maybe 18. I don't know. I really never asked her how old she is.

And I went to her in December. If it was December 24 or 25, I don't remember. But it was just Christmas or it will be Christmas. And she told me, we are going to have a good time because this German person you have, we will teach her a lesson. And the old lady is not worth nothing. And you and me are going to meet you nice boys.

I thought my sister would be wonderful to me if I tell her that. But I came home--

So she didn't know your sister was your sister?

I never, ever talked about who the old lady is and who my sister is, nothing. And when I told my sister that, the old lady said right away, we have to go right now. And we didn't have what to carry with us, because--

And again, just so we understand, this woman, Monica, they assumed your sister was really a German spy.

Yes. Yeah. They assumed. You know, I mean, I didn't ever talk about her. But whatever if I'll show you I have the picture of my sister. She was almost not quite as white-- mine is a beautiful white because it's a normal white. I didn't do nothing to it.

So then, when you went home and told your sister, your sister said, we got to go.

We got-- I mean the old lady really said we got to go. And so we went. And when we came to-- what is the-- forest, when we were there, we all of a sudden heard-- I'm sorry, I forget some. I know it in German. I can tell you that, Wald. But I can't say it in English.

Anyway, when we were there in the forest, the we were worried and. All of a sudden, we heard a-- we didn't know it

soldier, but it was a soldier's voice. And he said, do the military--

Password.

Password-- that I don't know either-- military password. And we didn't know nothing.

You're running in the woods?

We were running. So the old lady says, three women running, we don't know nothing. And when she said, we don't know nothing, a flashlight came on the old lady, on nobody else, on her. And then, on a man. And the next thing we knew they kissed each other. And we didn't know what was going on.

And the lady said, that's my younger son. And her husband was killed before she came to Russia. And she had an older son. But they didn't know.

And in 1942, the Czech government, who was in England, made the first battalion in Russia to fight with the Russians. And they were from that. And they were trying to go to the officers if they could take us along. But the officer said, no, because we didn't have uniforms. And they were in tanks.

So we didn't know what we will have to do. But we knew we had to go. And after a while, he came and he said that he will take his mother and two of his friends will take the girls. And he said that when we came to Poland, he's going to take us out like at 2:00 or 3:00 so the officers shouldn't know that we are there. And he will put us in Poland. I wouldn't go to Poland if you take me first class and carry me there. I wouldn't go.

But anyway, he went and he asked if she has a place. And he said, yes, they go upstairs, they can be there. And he said he will come. He said that we are the mother and two daughters.

So they took you to the border of Poland?

In Poland.

In Poland.

Poland. They gave us to this lady that we can be there. And it was cold. So we didn't get undressed or whatever. And all of a sudden my sister walks in. She says, we have to run right now.

You see, the Czech and Polish, we understood like 80% what they said. And she heard them say, I have here three Jews. If you want them, you can have them.

And she said we have to run right away. And it was almost the second floor. So she went to the window. And she said, you just throw the lady out. I will catch her. And then you jump.

So when she went to the-- I said, would you go to the window, please--

This is to the old lady, you said, go to the window?

She said, no, she wouldn't. I said, you want that in your mouth. She said, no. So I pushed her and threw it out.

And there was my sister who was half her size any way you looked at her. She was so skinny, nothing. And she didn't really catch her. But she broke her fall. [LAUGHTER] And then I jumped, but nobody helped.

She didn't break your fall?

She didn't break my fall or even have anything. And then we found--

So you're on the run again.

Oh, we were running, running like we could. If I would be now, now I can't even walk. Now I'm in bad shape. But I could run then. And we came to-- we got--

And I'll stop for just a minute. This is late 1944--

Yes.

--and so the war--

It was actually '45.

It's early '45.

Early '45, maybe the beginning of '45, because we were already going, you know. It was in December. And that was--

And the Russians are advancing--

Yeah. So after we took this car-- not car, it was a truck. And we came to Snina, which was in Slovakia. And now that's why we call the Czech Republic because now it's only the Czechs there. And the Slovaks are separate. No fighting or anything, but we are separated.

But we were in Snina, which at that time it was Czechoslovakia. And there were a lot of Czech officers and soldiers and all. And they gave us food, which was the wrong thing they did because we didn't have any food for a few days. And we ate whatever they gave us. I have no idea. But I know we ate everything. And we got so sick I can't even begin to tell you what happened.

So they took the old lady in the army. She was 36 or 37. She was really a young woman. And--

And so they took her into the army?

Yeah. And they would have taken my sister too, but I was too young. And they would have sent me back to Russia. There, they had a children's thing. I wouldn't have gone to Russia like I wouldn't go to Poland. I wouldn't go to Russia. So my sister and I stayed.

And soldiers and officers came to look at us like a circus clowns. They never saw any Jews coming back. And there came an officer who saw my sister. She was so pretty. And I have also her picture. And he was 15 years older than her. And he wanted to marry her.

But she said, I don't know you. And I don't want to get married. And she didn't marry him.

So then the army, the Czech army left. And as soon as they left, that same night, somebody threw a stone in the window. And when I woke up, my sister gave him-- she didn't have-- just a thing which you hang on--

A charm.

A charm.

A charm.

She gave that to the guy. And I had a little-- like I have the earrings. My mother used to call me sunshine. That's the sun. And I had a little sunshine like that also to put on.

That you'd hung on to all through--

Yeah, I didn't have where to hang it on except I could-- anyway--

But you had kept that all through the war years.

I kept it all through the war. She says, no, you keep yours. And my daughter has it now. She wears it. So she has my little sunshine.

And then after all that happened, the guy who we stayed with took us to another place in Slovakia, to Humenná. And there, he took us to a lady who had a baby, about 13 months or whatever. And she asked the man, could they do anything? He said, anything you want they can do. He knew better than we did.

So he brought you to her--

To her, yeah.

For her to take you in?

Yeah. And he said, we can do anything. So she told us she doesn't have any food, but she's going to her mother. And when she comes back, she will bring us. So she left the baby. And she had some noodles there.

And my sister said, you take care of the baby. I will wash the floor. So I went and I cooked the noodles. But I didn't do a good job. And it wasn't really soft. So I took it in my mouth. I chewed it, and put it in the baby's mouth. And the baby probably was just as hungry as I was, and he ate it.

And all of a sudden, I heard, again, you German spy, we will show you. And there was Russian officers. So I went out with the baby in my arms. And I said, she is not German. She's a Jew. And they said, you can tell anybody. I said, I'm not telling anybody. I said, she's my sister. She's not a German spy. She's a Jew.

And I talked and talked. And then all of a sudden, I see a Czech soldier. I said, what is he doing here? So then finally the Russians persuaded them that she was not German, that she was Jewish. They left.

And I asked the Czech, what are you doing here? He said, you know you were in Snina? I said, yeah, I know we were in Snina. He said, they were 16 Jews. And when they heard that you were also Jews, they came out and they were all killed.

And they thought that we were killed too. And they wanted to know. And they went to the guy where we stayed. And he gave him the address to go and he found us there.

And my sister asked him if he ever saw the officer who wanted to marry her. And he said, he's somewhere fighting, but he didn't know where. So he couldn't help her, you know. And it took my sister a whole month before she found him.

But she found him?

She found him. And she asked him, would you please marry me? And he said, yes.

Yes. He said, I wanted to marry you then.

Erika, in the little time that we have left, tell us when, for you, the war was truly over. And then tell us about reunification with your parents.

For us, the war really-- first of all, for us, it was very good that my sister got married because we didn't have any money.

We didn't have any ways to sleep anywhere. And we wouldn't have had any food or anything. It was really very good that she was married.

And on May the 9th, 1945, the war was over. And we didn't know where our parents are. I mean, we knew we left them in the ghetto.

In the ghetto.

But we didn't know is a ghetto finished or not finished. What's going on, we didn't know. So we were home. And when my sister got married, my brother-in-law had the best man. He was also an officer. And he was the man you saw, my first husband.

Robert Kauder.

Yeah. And he asked me if I would marry him. And I said, of course, because you see-- I shouldn't admit it, but it's the truth. I didn't want to go to school anymore. And I felt once I'll be a married lady, I don't have to go to school. So I said, of course.

My sister could not understand how come because she knew I didn't know nothing. During the thing when we were in the ghetto, I mean things happened, I said something in front of my sister And I really didn't know nothing. And my late husband wanted to put me to school. And I didn't really want to go.

But I said I would go where you are going. He was the fourth-- he was 10 years older than me. And he was the fourth year of medical school. He said, how can you go to medical school when you didn't even finish first high school? I said, I don't know, but that's what I would like.

And the teacher was a very smart teacher. She took one look at me. And she said, she's not going to make it. [LAUGHTER] And my late husband said, she will, because I will be the teacher.

And he was a very bad teacher. [LAUGHTER] He really was. He was a wonderful man, but he was a terrible teacher. I couldn't learn algebra. And I had a lot of problems.

But I made it I don't know how I made it. I don't know if I had all 4's, 3's, or whatever. I have no idea. But I made it. But unfortunately, my husband passed away, and I only made one year.

And when I came here, my mother was my second wonderful person who sent me to school. And I wouldn't have gone. But she said, so I will lose \$900. I said, why should you lose any money? She said, I never thought you'll speak back to me. And I did because I didn't see her for 14 years. And when I saw her, I would never speak back to her. But at that time, I did speak back. But then I went--