

Cela Miller

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>> Miller: Probably the Germans already start leaving to hide themselves. And she -- and after a while, I told her she shouldn't have done it because she was in danger, "Can't you hear the bombs falling," and all that.

Anyway... I'm making it really short. Anyway, I saw a soldier in the door, and it was American soldiers. They say it's an American soldier. This was my biggest dream, of course. [crying] You know, when the bombs were falling, I thought to myself, "If I live to see a soldier, I'll kiss his feet." But I couldn't get up. I had very high fever, and I think Bluma walked over. I'm sorry to make you cry. [crying]

>> Interviewer: That's okay.

>> Miller: Anyway, they took us to a hospital where they gave us a bath, a clean bath, and it was Holzhausen. The name of the hospital was Holzhausen, and it was close to Landsberg am Lech, Germany. And there were sisters, you know, there.

>> Interviewer: Nuns?

>> Miller: Nuns, there were nuns, and they were very nice to us, and doctors, German doctors, and of course it was organized by the United States, everything, probably Red Cross, which I'm pretty sure. And they gave us the first food. I remember it was, I think, rice and milk. And I couldn't believe to see that. So they gave me some, and I start eating, and my stomach couldn't take it. I couldn't eat it. [crying] I'm sorry. Anyway, I was there a long time. I was a lot longer sick than Bluma was. I don't know why.

I want to mention one thing that I forgot to talk about. Maybe I'll get away from this for a little while, okay?

>> Interviewer: Yes, go back and...

>> Miller: When...when they send us out from Bergen-Belsen to go to work on airplanes. Before they send us out, they had a whole commission. I don't know -- SS men, of course. And you had to take off your clothes and pass by them kind of not really close, but pass by them. They would look you over, if you still were able to work. You understand?

>> Interviewer: Yes.

>> Miller: And if you were like 35, 40 years, you were no good. And so, of course, they choose probably half of them, and the rest, we know what happened to them. And, okay, make it short. Bluma cried. She just thought that for sure that she will not be accepted because she was always very slim. She still is slim. She was just, you know, bones. But I guess she had a round face and of course very, very young, so she survived. They let her through.

Anyway...the whole time, it was -- you know, it wasn't easy. We knew where our parents, more or less, are, that they did not survive because it lasted so long. That was '42, and this was '45. And, anyway, some of the people that came into those same camps told us that they were on the same trains with them and they saw them, but these were like boys, 18, 17 years old, and some of them jumped the train and survived. So I knew where they went, and they didn't have a chance because, over there, it was just a camp where you -- it wasn't a camp. It was just crematoriums, and the only people work was with the Jewish people, you know, like put them through that or dig big ditches or whatever to, to...to put the ashes in and put the dirt on top. And, anyway...

>> Interviewer: Did you find out about your siblings? Did they go with your parents, or you don't know?

>> Miller: My father...my father and brother were separated, and they tried to do the same thing we did. And they were picked up and sent to the same place that my mother and sisters went. They were also hidden, you know, in the woods, and they went to little places, you know, in the country. And I don't know exactly how the Germans found them or if somebody told them they were Jewish. I don't know. But they did not survive.

At one time, at one time in the woods, we were still -- I'm sorry that I'm going back to the beginning.

>> Interviewer: That's fine.

>> Miller: When we were in the woods, I thought maybe some of my family is in the woods too. So my uncle and I went kind of -- and we knew that the Germans don't come in the woods. That's the reason we were there and more people. Because they were afraid because you can hide on a tree and kill them, so they would not go in the woods. So at one time, I took my uncle, which was my father's brother, to go and try to find somebody maybe from his family or my family.

And what happened was the, the -- the guy, again, who was in charge of the woods, he grabbed my uncle from behind and held him. He held him, and he said that he hates the Jewish people. "I'm gonna hold you," he said, "and you're going, you're going with me." You know, "You're going with me." well, you can understand how I felt. I started crying and run all around him so he wouldn't catch me. But I talked to him for a long time. I told him that this was my father and this is the only person that I have, and I said, "We are six are children, and I don't have anybody else, and from the family, nobody else -- everybody

went to Treblinka.” That was the camp where, like I said, nobody survived, and the ones who helped didn’t survive either because they had time to kill those too.

And I said, “Listen, I have \$200,” which was the same as *zlotys*, “and I’m gonna give it to you, but you have to leave. You have to let him go. Why would you have him on your conscience?” I said, “Don’t you have a wife? Don’t you have children? Why would you do that to him?” He kind of quiet down, and he wasn’t so mean and bad. And I took a chance and ran to him and put it in his pocket. And he let him go. He let him go, and right after that, of course we left. We left to go to the neighboring town where we found our other uncle.

Anyway, that was when we -- I’m coming back -- that we found ourselves in the hospital. Bluma was a little bit better, but I still had very high fever, and I couldn’t eat. But like I said, there was a doctor and the nuns, and they tried to help me as much as possible. I don’t know how long we stayed there because, if you’re well, they would send you to the next town, Landsberg am Lech, where there was a DP camp, a displaced person camp.

But...after I got better, I start going down. There was a beautiful garden around the hospital, and I couldn’t believe where I was, you know, that I was free. But I wasn’t strong enough yet to walk far. I would come down, sit down on a bench with Bluma, and just look around, you know, and see the flowers and everything. And then we would go back to the room.

And after a while, after a while, we were sent to that camp. We were sent to that camp, and...it was very hard for me to visualize what was happening. You know, we were free to go out from the camp, of course, and go to town, which wasn’t too far. And people were on the streets, and there were children and old people. [crying] But of course we didn’t have anybody, and it was very difficult. While you were in the camps, you had so much

to do with yourself, with the hunger, and of course I couldn't forget, but here, everybody's free, and in the camp there were only young people like we were, no children, no older people. But out of the camp, the German people were free, dressed, and going about their own business. And I couldn't believe it. I...I thought, if I live through, I would have to do something; I would have to do something to pay 'em back. But of course you don't do anything. You know, what can you do? They were people. They were people like you and I. And it was very difficult.

But then you kind of made a little bit friends in the camp. Some were that you knew from the camps -- of course mostly all of them from the camps. And there was a school. It was called *Fachschule*, or ORT. You know, it's an American organization, O-R-T. It stands for international school something. I don't remember what it stands for, but they were great. They had teachers from the displaced person camps. There were teachers. And we would go there, and Bluma and I were learning how to sew children's clothes, children's clothing. And we would even get paid while we were learning, not paid with money, but a package, like from the Red Cross. And there was -- you know, and we would -- somehow we got some clothes that we could wear.

I think what they did -- lots of people died in that hospital that I was in, because there was a tremendous cemetery. The cemetery was big, but what they did, they buried everybody in one grave, all the Jewish people. The reason I know that, some people that went to Israel came back later on to, to...to get the bodies of their mother or a sister or a brother. But the nuns told them that they had to bury them in one place, that that was planned like that.

Anyway, we would have some clothing already by then. You know, there was a -- they would -- from the United States with the clothing. And we went every day to school learning, and we made acquaintances and friends. And...let's see.

>> Interviewer: How long did you stay in the DP camp?

>> Miller: We stayed there from '45 until '49. The war was over in '45, and we came here in '49. And we met our husbands -- Bluma's husband and my husband were like brothers in the camps. They were together. They didn't have a brother, they didn't have any family, and somehow people would do that, you know, to have somebody to talk to. So they were both together, and...we met them both somehow, and we had a lot in common. And after a year, we married in '46, and, and we...

>> Interviewer: So they were all in the same DP camp?

>> Miller: Right, right. You could also live outside of the camp. But, you know, if you didn't have the -- what you call it? If you didn't have the money, you stayed in the camp. And, and we...we continued to go to school, and, you know, things got a little better because everybody was in the same boats, and we made friends, and the United States sent lots of pictures, American pictures. It was very reasonable to go see movies, and sometimes we would go see two, three movies in the evening. Some of 'em were even Jewish, you know, and that was great to see American movies because they were written in...either Polish or Jewish so we would understand. And some, like I said, movies were in Jewish.

And...then...then we started looking where to go because we knew this was just -- we would never stay in Germany. So we tried to register to go practically anyplace. Israel was still, you know -- you couldn't go legally to Israel. It wasn't our country yet. So we registered anyplace, and at one time -- as a matter of fact, in, in...probably in January '49, I overheard somebody say that they're registering people in Munich to go to the United States. Most people didn't believe it because they were always registering someplace. They were registering people in the same

camp where we were. We registered every place, and nobody got called no place. But I told my husband and Bluma and Felix, and I told them, "I'm going there to register. If anybody wants to go with me, that's fine. If not, I'm going." They said no. They said, "Why would you go register there? It's not true."

But I decided, and I went. And I went and found the place. Munich is a big town and everything. I don't know now if I would do it, but I, I -- through the whole ordeal, I tried to do something to survive, I guess. So...I went there, and I found the place, and I got the piece of paper. When I got there and the secretary said, "You are late. It's 5:00, and we're closed," I said, "Listen, I came from Landsberg am Lech. I had a very hard time getting here." I don't even know how I got there. Probably, probably -- I think I was standing on the road to get a ride to Munich. "And I just got here, and please, I don't have where to stay here. I have to go back. Please let me in." She looked at me and said...she said, "Here's the piece of paper, but don't tell them that I let you in. Don't tell them that I let you in. Tell them that somebody let you in."

Of course that's what I did. A young man, he said, "We're closed." I said, "You've just got to let me in, please." I said the same story. I told him, and he let me in. And they were still at the desks, and they started asking me questions. And I told them I had a sister and please register her too. They said, "Where is your husband?" I said, "He had a terrible cold, and he couldn't come." And then she says, "Well, how about your sister?" I said, "Believe me, it's going around so bad there." That's the only thing I could think of, you know, why they didn't come. So they said, "Okay, I'm going to register everybody." And I said, "Since I just have one sister, I would like to register her to go to the same place. And if you want, I'll bring my sister and my husband and everybody." So she said, "We'll let you know." So I thought to myself, I've heard that before, you know.

But, anyway, after six weeks, we had the papers to go to doctors, to go through doctors to see if we're able to come to the United States. And it was the biggest shock, you know. I mean, nobody believed me.

>> Interviewer: That you got everybody registered and that you were leaving?

>> Miller: Of course, yes. The first thing, the first thing I did was went with Bluma the next day to Munich and registered her and, and -- I mean, let her sign the papers, you know, and everything. And they promised that, after a few months, that she would come, too, to the same place. So we went through -- you know, we had to go through lots of doctors to see if we don't have any sickness that would, you know, that...I don't know.

>> Interviewer: Contagious.

>> Miller: Yeah.

>> Interviewer: If you're contagious, yeah.

>> Miller: Right, right. And I wasn't happy that she's not coming, but I believed that they would do that. In the meantime, Felix had registered to go to Israel by then because he had two brothers there that survived the war.

>> Interviewer: Felix is Bluma's husband?

>> Miller: Right. And, and...I knew that I had a big battle, but I thought even if they would be in Israel -- and I couldn't persuade my husband. He said he went through too much, he lost too much, to go to Israel now and, and...work that hard. You wouldn't believe what he start doing here when he came here; he probably worked harder! But he said if he has a chance to go to

the United States, he would go, and I could understand that because, when I was a child, the United States was like -- you couldn't dream about it, going there. Sometimes a friend of ours, an uncle would come, and they would bring clothing for them, and I would see those beautiful blouses that they would wear or whatever. I mean, I didn't even dream about it. But I wanted to get out of Germany. We were all so free since we got married, and I wanted a child. And so we left. We came here.

>> Interviewer: And you came over and came through New York? Or how did you get to South Carolina?

>> Miller: The Jewish community here in Columbia...brought us over here.

>> Interviewer: They sponsored you?

>> Miller: They was our sponsors, right.

>> Interviewer: Did you have any family here in Columbia?

>> Miller: No, nowhere.

>> Interviewer: No ties, just the Jewish community?

>> Miller: Right. We came to New York by ship, and from the ship, we went on a -- on the train, and we came by train. And the Jewish community, a few people from the Hadassah were waiting for us on the train, you know, on the train stop or whatever you call it. And we came to Columbia. We were the first survivors that came to Columbia, and they were really, really nice. As a matter of fact, one, one...one family took us in. It was arranged like that, that we stayed with them for a few weeks until we get acquainted and find a place and all that. It was the Gendils in Columbia. Mrs. Gendil doesn't live anymore, but

Sam Gendil still is here. He remarried. You know, it's been year -- that was in '49.

>> Interviewer: A long time.

>> Miller: Right, years ago. Anyway...we stayed with them about three weeks, and people would come in from organizations, and they would ask him -- we, of course, couldn't speak a word of English. That was the biggest problem. We didn't go to school either after the Germans came in, in '42. Nobody, you know, nobody could attend school.

So, anyway, we stayed with them. They spoke a little bit Jewish, very little, but a little bit, and that helped. And most people who came in to see us could not speak Jewish. But we understood, and they would translate that they -- that if David wants to go -- my husband -- if he wants to go to school first and learn the language, he would have a better chance to get a job, and it would be better. But he said no. He said, "I'll learn the language as I go on," he would like a job as soon as possible.

So they...they were looking around, and finally, a...Bob Burg -- his son is still in the same business and living, but his father, he didn't see him, but he told him to come to work one day, after 2 1/2 weeks, something like that, and he got a job. He was a very fine person, and his wife also, and his son is a very nice person too.

>> Interviewer: What was Mr. Miller doing? What was the job?

>> Miller: It still is a wholesale liquor place.

>> Interviewer: Oh, okay.

>> Miller: And he was working, working there in the warehouse. He was kind of a very strong man, David, my husband, and he wanted to work, he wanted a job, and he could do it, he said.

After...after we became citizens, which is after five years, we opened a small liquor store to help because, at that time, you know, life was not easy. He didn't make enough money to make it easier on us. I was, I was -- I already had a child. And, anyway, he worked there for quite a few years, and when we bought the store -- of course, we were here more than five years. We had -- even if it was rough like that, but we were told, and we were raised like that too, that you should save. When you have \$1, you should save something from the dollar. So we saved \$5,000 in five, six years, and with that, we opened the store. Then we opened another one, and things started looking better. We bought a house. And...

>> Interviewer: How long was it before Bluma came?

>> Miller: She came, she came -- I believe, five months, if not less, four or five months, and we lived in kind of a big house, and we took her into the house. In the meantime, too, that five months, they were learning a little bit English. But when somebody came in, they both ran away. Because of the Southern accent, they couldn't understand a word. And they, of course, knew very little English, you know, but...

Slowly and slowly, we -- you know, we have two children, four grandchildren. My son is an optometrist.

>> Interviewer: Okay.

>> Miller: And you don't want to know that.

>> Interviewer: No, I do. Go -- that was Ray who was talking to me.

>> Miller: Okay. And...and our daughter's a teacher, and she's married to a lawyer. They live in Tallahassee, Florida, and they have a boy and a girl, and my son has a boy and a girl, and his wife is also a teacher. And they...the children are very, very close to us, especially the son, who is here. He calls us every day, and if possible, he sees us every day. And they're both great children.

>> Interviewer: Celia, I want you to just relax for a minute and think, and maybe if you have any concluding remarks, is there anything you want to say about your experience as a survivor? Just anything that you want to say, if you want to go back, if you want to clarify anything. Just, you know, think for a minute and see if there's anything you'd like to add.

>> Miller: I could add that... I probably could thank Bluma that we survived because I'm older than she is and I kind of had the responsibility of her. You know, I took it over like a mother, I guess, and...I don't know if I helped a lot, but one thing, I tried for us to be always the same place at the same time so we wouldn't be parted.

And...and...the world shouldn't forget the Second World War, especially what happened in Europe to the Jewish people and the Gentiles too. There were lots of Gentile people, also, in the camps. I don't know what was -- I don't know why they did that. I knew that because we were Jewish, like my little sister who was 5 1/2 years old -- you know, I couldn't talk even, what they did with the children before, you know, before they took them to the crematoriums.

And then I hope that everybody appreciates the United States, and also South Carolina ETV for doing this, and for everybody concerned. And...Rose Shames is just great. And...and hopefully it will never happen again, but it's so hard to understand why

Hitler, why Hitler could...could bring a nation to the same thinking that he did and do that to so many millions of people and to rip apart so many millions families, so many families. And I still dream about the camps, and when I leave, I still...I still want take the sign to wear. After so many years, probably 50 years, I still watch if I need to put on the sign that I'm Jewish. And...I try not to forget the way my parents looked...and my family. [crying] I don't think I can go on anymore.

>> Interviewer: Okay. That's it. I'll get some water, okay?

00:37:51