00:00:32

>> Stern: -- the age of mine, and when I got there, the people mine age, I didn't meet them because from my town, if you didn't come on the transport the same day you met with other people -- I was behind, so I don't know if they were taken to the crematorium, the 12-, 13-year-olds. But I didn't meet anybody my age. But this woman must have been in the 20, and she must have known me. And she said, "Are you Jadzia Sklarz?" And I said, "Yes." She said, "I think that your little sister, I'm sorry to tell you, was burned, and she is in the hospital. If you run, you could still see her." I said, "Are you sure?" She said, "Yes. Go there." And I went. I went to this hospital, and I go from bed to bed, and I call out the name. I said, "Sabina, Sabina," and she lifts her head. And I see my little sister. The skin is all off her skin -- her legs, and I asked her what was happen -- what did happen to her. And she said she was appointed to lift the big pot of tea -- in the morning, you were given a bit of tea -- and she got burned. And she says, she saved -- she was hoping that I can find her because she got a piece of ration bread. She wants to give it to me, and I brought mine to her. And we embraced, and I told -- and I asked her what happened to Mama and the other three children -- the other four children. And she said they separated Mother from Father, and Jacob went with my father, and the other, the other two or three -- I don't remember -- which made up five children, she said they went with my mother, but my mother made me run to the good side, so I'm here. And I said, "But what good is it?" I said to myself. I said, "You know something? I'm not leaving you. Wherever you go, I go." And we cried, and we were in such a tight embrace, and I didn't want to leave her, and she didn't want to leave me, and she kept talking to me and telling me that all Mama was thinking was about me, if I ever got here or whatever happened to me. And now she said for me to go back and not cry. Mind you, she was a year younger. And that was April 25th, because I still light a

candle for her. And we were in such embrace, I made up my mind, I'm going with her, wherever she goes, and here comes in this Nazi and sees me standing on the edge of the bed, reaching out to her -- she was on the third layer, on the top -- and hits me over the head and grabs me by my prison dress. They only want you to die when they want you to die. What would have hurt him if I would have gone with her? I was willing. Because life already, by that time, '44, was meaningless. I, myself, start losing hope. But he tore me away from her, and I could hear her say, "Good-bye. Don't cry." And that was the experience I had meeting a member of my family.

>> Interviewer: And so the two of you were there in the same prison camp.

>> Stern: I saw her just for 15 minutes.

>> Interviewer: For just a very brief time.

>> Stern: Short time.

>> Interviewer: Wow.

>> Stern: I just couldn't take the seeing her. I saw where she was going, where they loaded her. I was standing outside a ways so the Nazis couldn't see me, hidden behind our barrack that was nearby. I never slept that night. That was the saddest moment. I still dream about her.

>> Interviewer: Did she tell you anything more about what she had been through at that point?

>> Stern: Well, since she was in Auschwitz in the same camp, she said she went through the same what -- thing I did. She worked in the fields. She was sorry that we couldn't find each other earlier. And you know, people think, and I say, "Well, maybe if Mother wouldn't have hidden me, maybe I would have gone -- been with her." But who can predict? So nobody from my family survived. Of my whole family, only three people. And my sister

who is Israel, she couldn't possibly live no place else. She said, "Europe was so torn with prejudice." When she asked me if I wanted to go with her, and -- she sees no reason for her to stay in Europe. She would never be comfortable. But she had a sad life, too, because life in Israel was hard for her. She has lost a grandson in the uprising. She has lost a brother -- a son-in-law. She has a daughter. And she had a little baby before she went to the concentration camp because that was her second marriage. She was married.

>> Interviewer: Yes.

>> Stern: And it's another sad story, the way they took her baby in her arms and killed in front of her.

>> Interviewer: Oh, Jadzia.

>> Stern: So what can I tell you? It is very traumatic for me.

>> Interviewer: I know. Tell me about the liberation.

>> Stern: Yeah, I will, but let me tell you, Auschwitz was the harshest, most worst camp. Four million people were murdered there and gassed.

>> Interviewer: In that one camp.

>> Stern: In that one camp. So you can see the smoke every day. We had to see. Sometime you would see red. The skies were red, and the smoke was red too. You know, when I was younger, I wasn't willingly -- always so willing to tell my story. I live here over 40 years. I came to this country in 1949, four years after liberation. And naturally, people, having an accent and having a number on their arm, ask me what it was. I wouldn't talk about it. First, people didn't understand what I was saying. You're an intelligent lady. And I told you the best I could, and I have learned, even before I could speak English, no matter how poorly you -- vocabulary is, you must say in plain words what happened. So I used to tell them, "I was in a death

camp. Because I was Jewish, I was discriminated. They picked on the Jews because of the religion." And I said, "But he killed also other people." Hitler was a, a tyrant. He also killed the Gypsies, people who object his policy. He probably killed his own people who objected to what he was doing, but not many, German. I wouldn't say it would go into millions. He also killed preachers who stood up what was right and decent. He killed senior citizens. He didn't want them. He also killed the sick, the handicapped, and the retarded. So you can imagine what a world we lived in the '30s and the '40s.

>> Interviewer: It is almost beyond my comprehension.

>> Stern: What I wanted to know when I came to this country -- but let me answer your question about my liberation. By that time, in 1944, they made us walk. The called it a Dead Walk. It was during Christmastime. First, we were put on an open train wagons that we could see the planes and the bombing. And then we went down, and we walked miles, from one camp to another. I don't remember all the camps I was in. But I was liberated in 1949 by the Russians in Leipzig.

>> Interviewer: In 19 --

>> Stern: 1945.

>> Interviewer: 1945.

>> Stern: 1945 in May, the first week of May, by the Russians. And some of them were not very kind. I told Rose [phonetic] about it. I'm skeptical to say it, but I might as well tell it the way it was. There were two beautiful twins that I was in the camp with. I don't remember too much about the liberation. Evidently, by that time, we slept in the fields on snow with frozen feet. I must have been 70, 80 -- I must -- emaciated, I mean. I must have weighed very little. But I remember the screams of the girls because the Russians felt that the prisoners, the women, owe them something, and they had to -- they must sleep with them and raped them. And some of them

fought them, and they were shot. So the beautiful twins lived through such a Holocaust, and they were shot by some of the Russian soldiers. I know it couldn't have happened by the Americans because I've never heard that story, but you will hear from survivors liberated in Leipzig by Russians because I have heard from other people, too, that that what happened.

>> Interviewer: Do you remember anything more about the liberation? What did you feel when they said you're free?

>> Stern: I was numb already. I remember I was sitting in the middle of someplace, I don't know, a building on a field. I remember a lady of 25 or 30 came to me, and she said, "You're going to come with me." She took me because after the liberation, the Germans ran away from the homes, and the liberators walked from the camp out, wherever they could find a home. And the homes were abandoned by the Germans, and she took me with her and other people that she was with, and she took care of me a few days. And later, when I came to myself, she fed me because you can always find something in a home like this. There was -- because we were not particular. Raw potatoes, we cooked, I remember. They made soup. But I was with this lady for a couple few days, and then I realized I was liberated. And we find some clothes in the homes. You see, the people who were liberated by the Americans had better luck because they were taken to a special home where they could recuperate. They were given medication or food. Whereby the Russians, you -- they liberated the place, and they left.

>> Interviewer: Tell me -- I want to be sure I understand. Was this lady a member of the town?

>> Stern: A prisoner.

>> Interviewer: She was a prisoner.

>> Stern: Prisoner.

>> Interviewer: Yes, and she just said, "Come with me."

>> Stern: She said, “You’re liberated. What are you sitting here for?” I said, “I don’t know. Where am I?” She said, “You are liberated. We are free to go. You go with me.” So I was with her maybe a week or ten days. When I realized I was free, we all started walking toward home because I think the trains were free for certain times. We walked, we took the train, and I finally wanted to go back home and see who survived from my family. And I go into Będzin, which had a beautiful park -- Wloszczowa had a beautiful park in the middle, too -- middle of the city. All the business exchange took place in that park. And I’m standing and look up on the first floor on the balcony where I lived, but I see it’s so different. My mother used to have ivy and different color flowers. And this old gentleman comes to me, and he said, “Tell me your name. I know you’re Jewish.” And I told him. And I said, “Here where I lived.” And I remember when my mother packed up for the ghetto and we could only take a little bit that she made a couple of boxes, big boxes, and gave this gentile lady embroidered tablecloths, coverings for the beds, beautiful, beautiful embroidered, you know, birds and flowers -- very valuable to her -- pictures, a portrait of her grandparents, silver candlesticks. Anything that was valuable to her and she couldn’t take it, she gave it to her friend. And I remembered that, and I said to this old gentleman, “I want to go and see the lady.” And he said, “She lives in your house.” I said, “Why couldn’t I go up there?” He said, “Don’t go up there. You won’t like it. Don’t go up there.” And I listened to him. Till this day I regret it. I never went there and got a few pictures of my parents and my family. Valuables I know she would have not given to me, but she probably would have given me some photos for my cousins and for my grandparents, my parents. Being 16 or 17, I still had the mentality of a 10-year-old. I believed him, and I left. And I didn’t know where I was going, but we all met up with other friends, with other people, young people your own age. You kind of grouped around your own age, and after a few months -- it was in September -- and as you were walking, there was male and female, and somebody recognized me, and they said,

“Jadzia? I know you. I know your brother’s alive.” So that’s the brother who’s in Columbia, but he would not come and talk. It’s very hard for him. He would have a heart attack.

>> Interviewer: But is that the first time you knew?

>> Stern: That’s the first time that was him, and he took me under his -- and introduced me to my husband. They were together in a men’s concentration camp. And I came with a horde of friends, about five, six girls, and they didn’t know what they’re going to be and what they’re going to do with their lives, but first they want to find out who else survived. Very few. If you met one person of 50, you were lucky. I was very lucky. I met my sister, and I miss her a lot, but she lives in Israel, and she did have a sad life, like I said, because her son -- her grandson of 19 was killed.

>> Interviewer: Which sister, now? Was this --

>> Stern: My oldest one who was married before.

>> Interviewer: This is the one that was --

>> Stern: The oldest one.

>> Interviewer: Yes.

>> Stern: Only the older people -- and the brother was in the army. These two survived, and I survived from the little ones. And then I want to go Wloszczowa and see, but I met people who said, “Nothing for you to back for. Not a single person except your family survived, the three of you. You’re lucky.” The whole 2,000 or maybe more, 500 people, wiped out. So what can I tell you?

>> Interviewer: Tell me, first of all, how you ended up in America.

>> Stern: My husband had an uncle. He probably told the story. And his name is -- was Gabe Stern. He is deceased; very nice

gentleman that was his father's brother. As a child he remembered that his family always wanted to immigrate to the United States. And his uncle left Poland because he couldn't stand the treatment from the boys. He was beaten up, and he was beaten up again, and evidently, one of the grandfathers was a rabbi. He didn't like trouble in town, so they gave him enough money for him to go to the port and immigrate because he always said, "I want to leave." And he caused trouble. He was fight -- he was a fighter. Good for him because if I would have been 17, I would have probably opened my mouth more to my friends, too, and not take the abuse. I had a brother, the one who my father gave a little bit money, the 17-year-old. He always, like Uncle Gabe from Columbia, South Carolina, that brought us back, so was my brother. When somebody picked on him, they knew well not to fight my brother Hillel because he's not going to stand for it. He was not afraid of the Polish bullies. So if you're very courageous, they're afraid of you. It's true. But in Poland at that time, the '30s and the '40s, the Jewish people, particularly in our small town -- it was a word. When you came in and complained -- they took your book, they took your homework, they called you name -- they said, "Shh, let's not start." Unless you know the parents and you tried to talk to them. So what I'm trying to say -- you asked me the question --

>> Interviewer: About how you got to America.

>> Stern: So my husband remembered that his father wrote letters to the uncle here. He remembered that he's in Columbia, South Carolina, and he is in the United States of America. He did not remember the street or the house number. So when -- after we were liberated and finally decided to get married -- my brother decided for me. He said, "You're going to get married to Ben." And I said, "What did you say?" I mean -- he said, "You're going to be married to him." So it took a little while. That was in September, but in June of the next year, sure enough, I was married to Ben. So Ben tells me, I remember when we got married in '46, he said, "I'm going to write a letter to Uncle Gabe. I

don’t know the house number or the street,” but on the back on the letter, he said, “I’m a survivor. Please try to find my uncle. I want to come to the United States.” He wrote the whole page on the back. And sure enough, it took six months. He got a letter from the uncle, and we talked on the phone. He talked on the phone to his uncle, and he was very generous. He paid for the visa, for the papers, and guaranteed that he’s going to support us because that’s what you have to do when you sponsoring a family from overseas. And we came to the United States of America. It was a trip two weeks on the ocean on an Army ship. And that’s the first time I ever was on a ship, and I was sick with a baby 12 months old, seasick for the whole time. I was on the floor that my husband -- and we couldn’t -- I don’t know why they -- they said the ladies had to keep the babies. I said, “But I’m sick. I wish my husband could keep her,” because it was very rough. The ocean was rough. I was throwing up. But somehow I survived the journey. Let me tell you about that. So when I got up, the day when everybody said, “We’re in America, in the United States,” and they started singing, I got up, I washed myself off, I brushed my hair, had something to put on decent. This man who watched me and crossed me every day for the two weeks’ journey, when he saw me, he said, “I thought it’s an old babushka laying on the floor. I didn’t know that you, a young girl like you” -- I said, “I was so sick.” When we got here, a wonderful tour guide greeted us. We took a boat to the Statue of Liberty, and she must have knew several languages. I understand that you got to know several languages because people come from all over Europe. And this was a transport from Germany, so she spoke in German and tried to interpret, “Give me your tired, your poor.” And she tried to explain it to me, and I burst -- I cried so hard and kissed the ground. I didn’t want to leave. And in the excitement, his aunt was waiting for us and I had certain -- outside. With excitement, I left my pocketbook where -- I couldn’t wear my ring because it bothered me when I was sick, and I took off my watch, my ring, anything that my husband worked for four years and tried to bought me. I left the

pocketbook on the floor because when he said, “Jadzia, show the nice ring I bought it for you,” show the aunt, I said, “What ring? I got it in the pocketbook. Don’t you have it?” He said, “No. Why would I have your pocketbook?” I said, “I left it by the Statue of Liberty.” So I said to my aunt, Helen [phonetic], I said, “Couldn’t we notify anybody?” And she said, “In America, there’s so many people. How would you notify anybody? You don’t know how many people passing by that statue, the Statue of Liberty.” So I said, “That’s okay. That’s a good price to pay to come into the United Stated of America.” For about 20 years, my husband said, “I’m not going to buy you any jewelry, not a ring.” Of course, I really was very careless. But when we came here --

>> Interviewer: Before you tell me that, I want to be sure because I’m not sure I understand. Where were you and your husband living in the time between your liberation and when you were married and when you came here?

>> Stern: Well, when I met my brother and he introduced me to my husband --

>> Interviewer: To Ben.

>> Stern: -- [indistinct] my husband right away and my brother went to work. And we ended up in a room or an apartment; must have been in an apartment because they had two or three rooms, one for my brother, one for us, and one -- a kitchen. Two rooms: two bedrooms and a kitchen. I think he was selling insurance or delivered groceries or something. He found a job that would provide him with a little bit of money.

>> Interviewer: In what city was this?

>> Stern: That was Munich.

>> Interviewer: In Munich.

>> Stern: Because he was liberated near Munich, which is Dachau. And we lived in this apartment from ’46, when we got married, to ’49. And before this, we were on our own for a few months, and we lived just with friends, wherever, you know.

>> Interviewer: And you came to this country --

>> Stern: And I came here to this country into Columbia, South Carolina, and adjusting here wasn’t hard. Even so, I stuck out like a sore thumb. I was always sad. I remember the lady in Beth Shalom, Belle Jewler, she said, when I used to bring my little girl to Sunday school, she always called me the little girl -- the little lady with the sad eyes. I was so sad. I was that sad. But my happiest years were when I raised my children. I have four wonderful children.

>> Interviewer: Tell me about them.

>> Stern: Well, the oldest one, Lilly, is the little girl, the 12-month-old that we brought here to the United States. She was born in Germany, and she’s a doctor. She’s gynecologist. She’s finishing up her residency in June. My son Billy has a degree in business and works as a developer with my husband. My third child, Helena, is an audiologist, and she’s got a degree in handicapped children and also speech pathology. They all have masters. They’re all above me. And my youngest one is a pediatric cardiologist in Charlotte. He’s a marvelous young boy I call my baby because several years ago, it must have been 1972, he was still in college, and the movie “Holocaust” was shown by Gerald Green. I don’t know if you remember the first movie about the Holocaust.

>> Interviewer: I remember, yes.

>> Stern: And he came home for Passover, for Easter vacation, and he says to me -- he watched the tele -- the movie and took my arm and kissed it. He said, “I wish I would have lived then. I would have killed all the Nazis.” And I said, “Oh, please,

God, I'm glad that I wasn't old enough to have to you then." So these are my four children, my pride and joy.

>> Interviewer: Let me ask you one thing that's very interesting to me. When you were freely able to worship again, when you were able to go into a synagogue for the first time, how important was that to you?

>> Stern: I'm glad you asked that question. It's a shame that you're not allowed to bring notes, but during the selections, in the '40s when I was in Auschwitz when I was in the concentration camp and I was standing on the ice, bare feet, and the young Nazis looked at my body and they tried to judge me, and I said, "Please, God, I'm so glad that any of these beasts are not related to me," how I felt going to the synagogue? I love my religion because like I said, I couldn't have coped with it if not for my religion. I was brought up to be decent, to be just, and to love thy neighbor. But even a nicer quote that I live by, it was told by me by my grandfather from Wloszczowa who was a small-town rabbi, and he raised his children -- usually Saturday night, we would get in his house, grandmother's house, and he would say, "I want to teach you something because I don't know how long I'm going to live. Always remember, what's hateful to you, if you don't like it, don't do it to other people." In simple words. I found out later that he didn't -- that wasn't his idea. It was by ancient rabbi named Hillel because I did try to conduct a lot of studies. I was curious. Why did the world didn't do nothing, even the wonderful country of the United States? I have read a book by Gilbert, who he claims that Roosevelt had a lot of information what's going on in Germany with the Jews and begged the United States to bomb the, the, the railroad that leads to the crematorium. They did bomb, but they didn't bomb the crematorium. So as you can see, I do think a lot. But I've realized, after searching for so many years -- I'm here over 40 years -- that human beings are not perfect, and there's always going to be evil. For the majority of people to study of the Holocaust is very important because we were the

victims, but they have to think about it, who are the killers? And if it's one germ in one household, you know that sooner or later, it can spread to another household. The Jews might be -- were the first one in the century to have suffered and paid such a sacrifice of 1 and a half million little innocent children and 6 million together. Brutal was the killing of the others, too, but the Jew and my little sisters, my three-year-old and my five-year-old and myself, 12-year-old, we were singled out because we were Jewish. So after a lot of studying, I said, Maybe I can forget about it and live in peace the rest of the life, but it's very hard. Each time I see a rabbi or a priest, I ask the question. I ask questions. I say, "What do you think? Why don't you teach the congregation?" Rabbis and preachers and teachers and principals alike, I did never imagine when I was in the concentration camp that after 50 years, teachers want -- the people want to know what happened during the Holocaust? When something bad happened to you, you think everybody knows about it. Well, they should know about it. And it amazes me when children during exam, during springtime, would call me and say, "Mrs. Stern, I have heard you are a survivor. Could I keep you on the phone for 10 minutes?" I always say yes. And they would write me a letter, they made an A, and they said, "Is it true that the Germans killed a hundred Jewish people and they were very mean to you? Were men together with the women? Tell me a little bit about life in the concentration camp." I would say, "Honey, I couldn't begin to tell you in 10 minutes."

>> Interviewer: There is so much.

>> Stern: I couldn't begin to tell you in 10 minutes.

>> Interviewer: You can't in 10 hours.

>> Stern: So sometime I would give my time, and they would come to the house. Let me conclude with a few words that I have written down.

>> Interviewer: Please do.

>> Stern: Because -- and more like you say, you talk, you don't need no notes, things pop into your mind, and I'm sure I got more information than I gave you now that I could talk about, but how -- what time is it? How long are we talking already?

>> Interviewer: You've got time. Go right ahead.

>> Stern: What I want to conclude with, to people who are going to listen to my testimony, and I made it very short, is, Our world is in bad shape, and everything will become even worse unless each of us learn the lesson of the Holocaust well. Since Auschwitz, we know what evil man is capable of. We also know that those who were murdered walked to their deaths with the Lord's prayer on their lips, which is, "Hear, Oh, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." And in Hebrew, it says, *Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Ehad.* I want to say something to my dear, beloved children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren. When there are no more Holocaust survivors to testify of the evil of the Jewish Holocaust -- because in Auschwitz, the best of humanity were murdered by the Nazis -- you will make me proud, dear children, if you will stand up to any form of defamation of Jewish people, and there's one more thing. I know I'm asking a lot. While you're at it, speak also for other minorities because I believe in you, and we come from a decent and rich heritage, and we believe in justice and brotherhood for all people. And if you remember this, I will smile at you. Well, thank you.

>> Interviewer: Jadzia, thank you so much.

00:35:41