

>> Starkman: -- went to -- during concentration camp, their quarters, their business had to be returned to them. So my uncle got back his place. And they -- my aunt was happy. She got another sister's child there. And then I heard Leah is alive and Max too. He says, "Yeah." He says, "I sent already a telegram." He says, "Where?" He said, "No, they don't live there." So my uncle right away took the trolley, went to send another telegram to the real address, so the second telegram came to -- we got two telegram. During the time, between all that, the ticket came from the Red Cross, and I was able to travel legally because, you know, I had no passport, nothing. I mean, I was still a minor. My uncle went and smuggled into Belgium to be able to see his brother, and I'm sure that cost him quite a penny, but he wanted to see him. Well, in Paris, we were split, okay, because I went legally and he went illegally. So through Paris, he knew some people there. He found them, and they took care of him to go through. I go on the trolley.

I still remember where my uncle lived, everything, so I went there. My father goes out of the place. He looked all swollen. He didn't even look skinny like, you know, you heard people saying the people coming out from concen -- he was swollen. No hair, you know, just started to grow, and he looked so pathetic, so worn out, so old to me. I thought it was another customer of my uncle, you know. I didn't realize it was my father. I walked in the house, and my aunt was screaming. She thought it was a customer downstairs. She said, "who is it?" I say, "It's Leah." She says, "What kind of Leah?" You know, she thought it was the other Leah. She said, "*Tante*." We called her *Tante*. Said, "It's Leah." She ran down the steps, and she knew right away who I was. Started crying, says, "Your father just walked out," and I ran out, and I realized it was him. And I ran after him. I says,

"Papa." That's "daddy" in French. And we were crying there, standing in the street and crying. My uncle is looking at us.

He's just -- first word I asked, "where is my mother?" He says, "We'll talk about it." He never wanted to talk about her. Then we came back in the house. They never went -- my uncle went by himself, and he walked back with me, and he told me that my cousin was alive. And I knew -- I remember her from going to Poland. And then we found out that the other niece is alive, too, from the older sister, one of them. But she lived in France. And then after this, my father just helped my uncle being a shoemaker. Tried to make ends meet. The ORT trained me for typing and shorthand, but I never used it, and clothing came to the Jewish community center, and we were allowed to go and pick out what we could. Each child was allowed to pick up one or two outfit; I don't remember. I had no winter coat, so from an American blanket, bought on the black market, we dyed it in brown, and we had a coat made for me. And because winter was approaching and Belgium, the winters are pretty rough, and we stayed with my aunt for a while.

Everything run smooth, but it was rough. Everything was crowded. We were all together. And it didn't work out. I had a rough time with my uncle there. Couldn't stay there. My father stayed there. And he wanted me to -- I was so innocent. He wanted me to go pick up some American soldiers. He told me he doesn't feed me for nothing. He wanted to do black market with them, I guess. And he's still alive, that uncle, now. I never hold grudge against him -- it's funny -- because I love my aunt so much. She came upstairs and says, "He didn't mean it the way you took it." And I was crying. I say, "You all get away from me," and I was gonna jump out the window. During that time, my father walks in, and he took his sister, hit her against the wall. He says, "What are you trying to do, destroy my only child?"

After this, he took me and took me to another cousin of his, and I stay with her, and he paid her because she was a woman alone

with a child; paid her for the food, not for keeping me. I stayed with her. Then to give her a break, he took me to someone else because everybody was struggling, you know. To another friend from his hometown, and the daughter was a good friend of mine. In the beginning, when I saw my daddy, I didn't want to leave him alone. I wanted even to sleep with him. I was afraid he was gonna disappear again. He decide that it was not healthy, the way I was clinging to him. He decide -- there was now a youth organization in the Jewish community center. He says, "You have to try to be with young people your age." He took me there and left me there. I felt like it was the end of the world, like he had abandoned me. And then they start singing the Hebrew song and doing the Hora, the young people. We all sang, and I sat there. All of a sudden, my husband was in the group of the youth, came and picked me up, pulled me. He says, "Come on, let's dance the Hora." That's the way I met him. And we all dance, and I joined the group there. I was still young, I mean, just meeting all the kids, and then some of them, I remember from before the war that I knew very well. And after this, I got a little bit better, and I could stay away from my daddy, you know.

After a while, we stayed there. My father got back his -- our place, but only the store, not the kitchen and not the room in the back. So he put a curtain in the middle, and he slept there in that bed, and I slept at the neighbor's house. Not enough room, so the law was, I could not stay in the same house with my father, those separate bedroom. Then eventually the landlady gave us back the back. She had people living there, so she could not just throw them out. You know, they had to find their own living quarter. Then they gave me back the kitchen and the bedroom. She had all my parents' furniture, my father's tools, everything in the basement, hidden, so he got everything back. That's why I still have some of the older picture that I found, you know, and some my uncle gave me. I think we had a pretty

normal life after this. You know, my father trying to pick up the pieces, struggling, and make a go of it.

>> Interviewer: Leah, can you, can you tell us how you came to the United States?

>> Starkman: Oh, yeah. Then after this, in 1948, I got married, and my husband had already paper that was started by his grandmother who was here for 40 years in the United States that he never met. And so he was included with his parents because father-in-law found his mother -- you know, she found him, that he was alive, okay. That story, I really don't know. So he had his quota, but I'm from the Belgium citizens, so I couldn't go with him. His parents came to the United States first, and I think that was in 19 -- I came in 1952. They came a year before. And they were, you know, pretty -- they did pretty well in Belgium when they start out. He was -- the restaurant is my in-laws' and things like this, so they right away could go into business. And they had money, a little bit, so they could help us, for us to make the trip. Well, but I didn't have nobody to sponsor me. My mother-in-law found two niece and a nephew here in the United States. And one of the cousins, my husband's cousin, sponsored me. Like, that's the way -- my husband came under this Polish quota, and I came under the Belgium quota. It took very little time, just legalize paper. That was an open quota, the Belgium people. You know, the Polish people, they had to wait six year before they could, or close to that. I don't know; many more year. And we came to the United States and start a new life. I had one child by then already. My oldest son was born in Belgium.

>> Interviewer: And how did you make your way to South Carolina?

>> Starkman: The job, my husband. The place went bankrupt, and he looked for a job, and we had some French-speaking friends here, and they offered my husband a position to be a manager, and they trained him for it, and we wind up in Spartanburg first and then here in Columbia now.

>> Interviewer: Leah, thank you so much for sharing your story with us today.

>> Starkman: Thank you.

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