

Transcript:

Esther Loeb

J36

51m15s

Interviewer: Elizabeth Limor interviewing Esther Loeb on the 10th of June, 1990.
Esther, what do you remember, what are your earliest memories of the war?

Esther Loeb: Of the war or before the war?

Interviewer: Of the war.

Esther Loeb: Of the war? Well, you mean like in 1939?

Interviewer: I guess so.

Esther Loeb: Yeah.

Interviewer: Before the war, you lived in what town?

Esther Loeb: We lived in the city of Bramburg.

Interviewer: Is she loud enough?

Male: Mm?

Interviewer: Loud enough?

Male: Hmm-hmm.

Esther Loeb: Which was a [unintelligible 0:00:43.0] and it was just on a...you can hear? Okay. It was just on a border where the German wanted to take it in 1939, September 1st of 1939 when the war broke out. I remember, where the Poles and the Germans in our town...excuse me, in our town, when they found out that the Germans are coming, the Germans started fighting with the Poles and we're the ones that suffered because they came and burned the houses and—

Interviewer: Who burned the houses, the Germans?

Esther Loeb: The Poles.

Interviewer: Poles.

Esther Loeb: —and the Germans, both of them, right. They fought between themselves but we're the ones that suffered. And I remember mother was saying to my daddy, I guess we're going to send the kids to Lodz and we just stay here because we had stores and we had our home there and they send us away thinking that the Germans will not come to Lodz.

Interviewer: They sent you away?

Esther Loeb: They sent my sister and I away.

Interviewer: By what means?

Esther Loeb: By train. Yes, they sent us from Bramburg to Lodz by train. And of course my mother—

Interviewer: You had some relatives in Lodz?

Esther Loeb: Yes, my mother's sister, her whole family was there, because that's where I was born really.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Esther Loeb: And all I remember, that we were...for about two or three weeks, we did not hear from our parents and finally, we got reunited but they walked for two weeks. They were hiding at night and walking because the Germans were bombing Poland and of course, they took it in two weeks.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Esther Loeb: One, two, three, unfortunately. At that time, they start taking kids. They come to the Jewish community and asked for children. They started with like 17 to 20 and then they were done from 10 to 15--

Interviewer: This was in?

Esther Loeb: That was in Lodz.

Interviewer: In Lodz already?

Esther Loeb: Yes. And when they came and asked for the children, for girls in particularly age 10 to 15, that's when my daddy got scared and we decided to...my daddy decided to run away and we didn't know how to run away. Anyway, my father gathered my mother and my sister and I, we had nothing to take with us so there was nothing to carry, and we tried to escape, which we did.

Interviewer: In what way?

Esther Loeb: Walking, hiding.

Interviewer: Toward?

Esther Loeb: Toward the river Rhine, so we can cross Ukraine because my mother's brother was there and we're trying to get a hold of him and then from there, maybe go to the United States or go anywhere just to escape the Nazis.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Esther Loeb: I remember when we used to go and stand in line for bread and of course we wore the yellow—

Interviewer: Band, armbands?

Esther Loeb: Arm with the Jude in it and I remember standing in line for about four, five hours and finally, my turn came and there was the SS man standing as my turn came and I was just about to take money and pay for the bread, he took me out of the line and sent me again to the end of the line and I had to wait another four, five hours before I got a small tiny piece of bread. But anyway, we escaped and we came to the river.

Interviewer: You didn't escape all the time by foot? You—

Esther Loeb: No, no, no, no, we borrowed, stole, and whatever, whatever we could and we tried to go to Ukraine, okay? Then we came towards the river, where there were hundreds of people thinking the same way as we did, wanted to cross the river to Ukraine. Well anyway, they had to...in other words, you had to smuggle yourself through there and it cost money. And my mother and father, they had a little bit with them and the little boats came, they were like fishing boats and they take so many people. Well, one boat came and my daddy paid him off and while he was paying—

Interviewer: The smugglers, I understand, were the Ukrainians?

Esther Loeb: They were Ukrainians, right. And as my father was paying them off, people started running toward the little boat and it was full already and my mother couldn't get in because she just couldn't get in, they didn't let her go in anymore so my father and my sister and I went and he wanted to swap places but mother says, "You go on, I'll come with another boat." Unfortunately, it did not happen that way. We crossed the river and the Ukrainian caught us on the other side and they stripped of everything people had, whatever they had, they stripped everything, they had nothing left, neither did we. But my daddy had a little bit, I don't know

how he did that but he had a few marks or whatever it was and we could smuggle ourselves toward Vilna, that's where we were in Ukraine. But anyway, we come to the city and there were people lying on the streets, hungry, begging for food, children, it was awful. It was just awful.

Interviewer: To which city was it?

Esther Loeb: L'viv.

Interviewer: L'viv.

Esther Loeb: Right. And from L'viv, we want to go to a small town, I don't remember what town it was, but it was a small town where my uncle was supposed to be and he was supposed to help us to go to the United States or any other country for that matter just to escape. And we knew that mother would come to that little town, otherwise, we won't be together. She wouldn't know where we are and we didn't know where she was. We have no money, daddy had a little bit, and whatever he had, he paid for the bread which was very, very expensive. There was no food and he was knocking on doors, from door to door, begging the people so they'll take me and my sister overnight but everybody was full. There were people lying on the floors all over and I remember, we knocked on a door and there was an elderly lady came out and my daddy told her, "Would you please take my kids and I'll go to the park, I'll sleep in the park," and it was cold mind you at that time. And she looked at my sister and I, she says, "I have no room for you all." And my daddy started to cry and says, "Just please take these kids, I'll stay outside, I'll go to the park." And evidently she mellowed and she took me and my sister and gave us her bed for that particular night. I'll never forget that. And early in the morning, we knew daddy was in the park so my sister and I ran to the park looking for daddy and there were people, hundreds of them lying all over the grass. It was horrible. And then we looked and we saw our daddy was lying on a bench. He was cold. He was just blue. My sister

and I ran to him and warmed him up, rubbed his hands and rubbed his body, and he finally came to it. Well, we found a guy that...he kind of felt sorry for us and he had...it was a farmer.

Interviewer: He was a farmer?

Esther Loeb: He was a farmer and he took us to that little town with his hay and his wagon and his little horse. It was going to take us two days and two nights to get there but we came there and we were looking for our uncle and he was gone. When the war started, he went that way and we thought that he is going to be there. To make the story short, we didn't find him and we couldn't go anywhere. We had to wait for our mother to come. Well, we had nothing.

Interviewer: Have you had any contact with her?

Esther Loeb: Not at all.

Interviewer: How would she know where to come?

Esther Loeb: Because, in that little town, her brother was and that's where I would go, where else to come.

Interviewer: So you knew that...yeah.

Esther Loeb: So we knew that she's going to come, that's where she's going to come. That was in Ukraine, mind you, a small little town, I don't remember the name of the town.

Interviewer: Okay.

Esther Loeb: Daddy looked for work, anything to keep us alive. With no place for us to go, we slept outside on the fields. It was a farm town, we slept on the fields and then we go and started all over again. There was a family, they were childless. They had no children, an elderly family, and my daddy made a pact with them. He says, "If my wife doesn't come in one month, you can have the children and I'll just leave," because we had nothing to eat, we were starving. Well anyway, she took us in and my daddy used to come every night and knocked on the window. He just want to see if we're okay and whatever scrap they had left, and it wasn't...not that much food but whatever we had left, we used to wrap it in paper and gave it to daddy. And that's how he survived and there were three weeks.

Interviewer: Where did he hide at this time during the day?

Esther Loeb: Well, he was—

Interviewer: Oh, it was safe in the Ukraine at this time.

Esther Loeb: He was begging. He was a beggar. He was begging on the streets. He was just a beggar. And after three weeks, my mother came, and we saw our mother and her feet were swollen. I mean her legs were swollen. She crossed twice the river and twice they caught her and twice they sent her back. And the third time, she decided to go all by herself, the river was frozen and she went by herself and she came by herself. Then we stayed about three months together. Somebody gave us a little small shack and we made a little room and it was nice. We just were together. Then one night, there was a knock on the door and here were the Russians and they said, just as you are, get everything what you can, just

whatever, and just maybe a sweater, whatever, and come. We had no sweaters, we had no clothes, so what we had, we put on and we left.

Interviewer: Why did they tell you to go out?

Esther Loeb: Well, they took us to a place and they kept us for hours with red tape. They want us to...they accused us of being spies and they want us to sign papers that we are Bolsheviks. But my daddy and mother would not sign and he says that we're from Poland and we're Polish, we're not going to sign anything like this. So they said, "If you won't sign it, we're going to send you away." So daddy says, "Well, you're just going to have to send us away then," which they did. They sent us, they put us on a ship which was a freighter, I imagine, it was a freighter and there were hundreds of people in it. And they carried us for about two or three weeks and they send us to...well, I don't know how you say it but it's [unintelligible 0:13:20.1] which is the Siberian tigers. A jungle, okay? There was an island. There was no way you can leave and the only way you can go or come was by boat. Evidently, they had prisoners on there before because they had a small little...like a small tiny wholesale—I mean, a warehouse-like where they kept the—

Interviewer: Storage.

Esther Loeb: Supplies.

Interviewer: Oh.

Esther Loeb: The supplies. And they left us there and they kept the supplies and they decided to have one man, that he will make distributed supplies for certain amount of time. They happen to pick my father, and he was in charge of it and we had to have fire burning day and night because there

were animals, snakes and the mosquitos were about half an inch big. They were awful. It was just awful. As a matter of fact, my sister and I were chased by a bear. That's all in...that wasn't funny. It's funny now but it wasn't funny then.

Interviewer: What did your father got for this that he kept the job?

Esther Loeb: Nothing. Not a thing.

Interviewer: Food?

Esther Loeb: Food, like everybody else, he distributed it equal to everybody and we were there about three and a half months. There was no escape.

Interviewer: Were you together with your father and with your mother?

Esther Loeb: We were, yes. There were...all the people were together and there were...everybody built like little tiny--

Interviewer: Shack?

Esther Loeb: Shacks and things from straw, whatever they could find, and that's how we stayed there for three and a half months.

Interviewer: And what time of the year was it? Was it cold or—

Esther Loeb: Well no, it was not cold. At that time, that particular place was not cold, no. It was cold at night but it was not that cold. Then, after three and a half months, their ship came, also a freighter, and took us all off and that's when they sent us to Siberia and that was the real McCoy.

Interviewer: Where was the place before?

Esther Loeb: That was Siberia jungle. That was an island. Just a plain island on the water. I have no idea where it was, never knew, I still don't know where it was and that's when they send us to Siberia. I don't remember the name of it. It was a little place that only have broken down barracks with nothing in it. Broken windows, there were no doors, with just barracks one next to the other and that's where they send us. And it was freezing, now that's what...it was cold. I mean, really, really cold. And my father used to get up early in the morning and they used to send, take all of the men and all of the people that could work, because I worked too but I worked in a factory. And I used to go through woods, and snow was almost in my waist and it was clothes and we had no clothes, nothing, whatever we had on ourselves. And my father used to go every morning to work and his toes were frozen, his fingers were frozen, his—

Interviewer: Nose.

Esther Loeb: —nose was frozen, and he come home—

Interviewer: And they did not supply any clothing?

Esther Loeb: No, none, only what we had. As a matter of fact, mama had her fur coat, that was the only thing that kept us and they gave us wood to make fire twice a day, it was in the hallway. It was one little stove and were about 15 families in that barrack and everybody stayed in line to warm up a

little water. And then after about seven months of terrible hunger, depression, and sickness—

Interviewer: What did the man do in the tundra, they cut trees?

Esther Loeb: Cut trees and chop trees and whatever. And one morning, my daddy couldn't get up. He had fever. He was sick. And then we found out my mother was pregnant and we couldn't get a doctor for my father they made him go to work and he couldn't get up, he had fever, he had pneumonia. And when finally, they didn't know what was wrong with him, they finally took him to, what you call a little clinic and the doctor said that he won't live. There's nothing they can do about it. Well, my father died and he was 38 years old. And the child was born seven days before my father died, we had a little brother. His name was Joseph. He was the most beautiful little thing you've ever seen.

Interviewer: The child lived for a few days?

Esther Loeb: No.

Interviewer: Or was born still?

Esther Loeb: He lived a year.

Interviewer: A year?

Esther Loeb: He lived a year. When mother found out that daddy died, she lost milk in her breast. She had nothing to feed him and we had nothing to give. Well, I have about nine months, eight months, they thought—

Interviewer: What have you girls been doing? What was your job? Has mother been working?

Esther Loeb: Well, we were all working. Mother didn't work, no. My sister and I worked and what we did, if we had a little money left, we bought a little milk and squeezed it in the child's mouth. We had nothing, anything like this. They didn't give us anything. I don't know how the child survived, it was just pure love, I think. Well—

Interviewer: What have you been working at?

Esther Loeb: I have work chopping woods, cutting trees, and did the same thing that the men did.

Interviewer: Mm.

Esther Loeb: And then they told us that we are free, that we can go anywhere we want, on warmer places. We cannot leave Russia but we can go. We had no money, we had nowhere to go. We didn't know where to go. Well, we heard from other people that there are warm places like Kyrgyzstan or Kazakhstan. Well, we decided to go with the majority of people and we had no money so my sister and I used to go in the day time to the farmers and look where the potatoes were. And then at night we'll go and steal it and sell it and accumulate some money and finally we had enough to get tickets and we went to Kyrgyzstan.

Interviewer: Kyrgyzstan?

Esther Loeb: Kyrgyzstan.

Interviewer: Kyrgyzstan.

Esther Loeb: Which was middle Asia and with the baby and we had no place to go. We had nothing. And there was a Tartar, these were Russian Cosack. A Tartar has got eyes like this.

Esther Loeb: And he gave us a room, my mother, and myself, and my sister, and the baby. And then my sister and I used to go to the baker and get the baker's dozen and if we sell 12, we had one little roll for ourselves. So used to we sell all day long, when we come home, we'd be with three or four little rolls between us and we cut it and we gave to that old man and he let us stay and that's where we stayed. And my sister and I used to go to the station, the train station and sell all of these and if we get a few little rolls, we had that and shared it. And the baby, the baby had nothing. It just died. It just...we had nothing to feed her with. Mother had no milk in her breast and it died. I don't even know where it was buried. And going back to my father...

Interviewer: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about it.

Esther Loeb: Going back to my father, I meant to tell you, when my daddy died, my mother didn't know. She was in a small little place where they kept her because she just had the baby and they took my father, I don't even know where he's buried. They took him on a sled and a coffin and my sister and I were following it and the snow was up to our waist and we were little. Well, I'm still little, but still...and they buried him, I have no idea where it is, somewhere in Siberia. I have no idea and whenever he—

Interviewer: Was it a cemetery or just a hole in the ground?

Esther Loeb: It was just a hole in the ground that we can...as far as I know. I have no idea where. There were no cemeteries, they just buried him, and I have no idea where he is and wherever he is, may he rest in peace and we never forget. And the same thing happened to our little brother. They buried him, we don't even know where. They just took him and buried him. Well, then I got a job loading and unloading freight trains with coal and my sister was working in a sugar factory. And it's a little human, that we used to steal a little coal and we steal sugar and then we go on the black market and buy some material, make some clothes for ourselves and get some schmattes to cover our feet, we had no shoes and nothing like that. And it was tough, it was really tough, we were hungry, lonely, depressed all the time. We used to come home with a tiny little bread, a tiny little piece of bread that they used to give us, no money and it was hot and we had to work for a whole week to get that piece of bread. And then we come home and here lies my mama, she was all swollen, she didn't want to live, she didn't care anymore. And we just walked her and begged and kissed and loved her and tell her we love you, you have to be with us because that's all we have left. And she survived and we survived but it was rough, it was really rough. It seems like you lost your dignity, your pride, and you lost...we have never lost our faith, thank God, but you lost everything and you ask yourself, ask, "Why?"

Interviewer: How were the Russians toward you?

Esther Loeb: Oh, they were—

Interviewer: I assume you were in contact with Russians.

Esther Loeb: Oh sure, we were right there, I spoke Russian perfectly. I speak really perfect—

Interviewer: Yeah, but how did they treat you?

Esther Loeb: Well—

Interviewer: And besides, were there also other people than Jews or only Jewish people?

Esther Loeb: I don't know about any other than Jews. The only one that I knew were Jews and there were not too many of us and they didn't treat us so badly. But it wasn't good neither because they called us Jew, you're a Jew, you're Jew and they didn't treat us so good, really they hadn't. They didn't care if we live or not because they didn't even take any interest in us. They had no idea where we were and they didn't give a flip. They just didn't care. And we had to survive on our own by eating grass which we ate and we never asked anybody for nothing. If we didn't have any, we just didn't eat. And I remember, I used to go with my sister to the farms and wait for the cows and get their manure and dry it and it was the best thing to make a fire with. And then we get hot water and get some a lot of grass and cook the grass and eat it and clean the floors with this so there won't be any bugs, and my mother used to, if she had a little extra sugar that we stole or a little extra coal that we stole, she swapped it for kerosene and washed our hair so we won't...cleanliness, I think that's why we survived. It's cleanliness and faith in God I think. That's what made us survive. And...it was rough. It wasn't easy at all. It was really rough. My mother had a rough time. She lost a husband, she lost a son, and she was fighting for survival for both of us and I think, because of my sister and I, I think she lived. Other way, I don't think she would have lived. She would have gave up. And of course my sister and I, we never had any youth. We had to work and I think that's why we feel now, we live now, thank God. You think about all of these things and it's hard to say, the little things that happen in between, you can just pinpoint everything.

Interviewer: What comes to your mind?

Esther Loeb: But the main things that come to your mind, it hurts. I never had a chance to see my uncles and my aunts and my cousins that I knew. My mother had five brothers and three sisters, there were eight children, nobody is left. My father's family, all my family, there's nobody here but my mother, my sister, and I. That's all that's left from my family. And it was a terrible war and it's a terrible loss. And I think, this is the right thing, you people do because—

Interviewer: It's not us people. It's all of us, you and us.

Esther Loeb: I know, that is what I'm saying, the Federation or whoever, right.

Interviewer: But tell me, this what you gave me is a period of about two or three years?

Esther Loeb: No, that's a period of five years, five years, from 1940 to 1945. That's five years.

Interviewer: Where did the end of war find you?

Esther Loeb: In Kyrgyzstan. Well, the name of the place, Tashkent, there was a small place on Tashkent.

Interviewer: Oh, you were in Tashkent.

Esther Loeb: Right, Tashkent, near Frunze, absolutely. That's where we were until 1945.

Interviewer: Did you girls...went to school because I know that there was a Polish school?

Esther Loeb: No, we did not go to school, we had to work, so there's no way I could go to school.

Interviewer: Did you do something besides the work in order...besides stealing to survive? Did you do some hand work that you could sell to the Russian soldiers?

Esther Loeb: No, we had to work. I worked all kind of works that you can imagine that a little girl should not have worked. It was unbelievable, what we did. And when you stop and think about it now, I wonder how did I do that? I remember I used to walk eight miles to work to fields and work with hay, gathered hay and barefoot. But I was young and I did that.

Interviewer: You mentioned that you kept clean.

Esther Loeb: Yes, we did.

Interviewer: You didn't have any lice and any rats any--

Esther Loeb: No, we did not.

Interviewer: You're lucky.

Esther Loeb: We are lucky because my mother believed in cleanliness. And like I said before, if we didn't eat, we sacrificed but we bought kerosene to wash our hair and keep ourselves clean. And I think that was one thing that we were not sick and survived.

Interviewer: How was it between the other people who were with you? Were there sicknesses?

Esther Loeb: There was a lot of...yes, there were a lot of sickness.

Interviewer: Typhoid?

Esther Loeb: I beg your pardon?

Interviewer: Typhoid?

Esther Loeb: I don't know about that. I don't know about typhoid but there was sickness, there were death, and it was a lot of misery. Of course, we were right there too but we were not as sick as anybody else was. I was sick. I was in the hospital for a little while. I think I had pneumonia.

Interviewer: What was the hospital? Run by whom?

Esther Loeb: It was run by the Russian. It was in that little place in Tashkent.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Esther Loeb: It was a small little hospital.

Interviewer: There was a doctor?

Esther Loeb: There was a doctor, yes.

Interviewer: Nurses?

Esther Loeb: There was a doctor and nurses. As a matter of fact, that's what I believed...that's why I really started to become a nurse.

Interviewer: Hmm-hmm.

Esther Loeb: And I was a nurse when I went to Israel and in 1947, I was in the army for two years in Israel and I lived in Israel for six years. That's when my sister came over here in 1949.

Interviewer: Where did the end of the war find you?

Esther Loeb: Russia, in 1945.

Interviewer: And what did you do then?

Esther Loeb: My sister left before. She married a Russian, she left.

Interviewer: One second.

Esther Loeb: Yes.

Interviewer: You were liberated?

Esther Loeb: No my dear. I was not liberated.

Interviewer: How did the end of the war find you?

Esther Loeb: I was in Tashkent. I didn't even know that was the end of the war and my mother and I escaped. My sister sent papers supposedly and we got papers that we can leave and go to Poland which was also occupied by Russia. But we have escaped, really just escaped. Travelled by...

Interviewer: Did anybody bother you during the escape or—

Esther Loeb: No, they didn't because I spoke—

Interviewer: —already you felt free?

Esther Loeb: I spoke Russian and I didn't even know that I was not a Russian. I was young and I picked up the language very fast and they did not bother us until we came—

Interviewer: As a matter of fact, you have here a picture that you looked like a Russian

.

Esther Loeb: Yes I have.

Interviewer: Would you like to show it to us?

Esther Loeb: There it is.

Male: Just hold that up for a while. Okay.

Interviewer: Unfortunately, this is the only thing, as I understand, that you have?

Esther Loeb: This is the only thing I have left. We have no picture whatsoever. Not from Poland, nothing, absolutely nothing.

Interviewer: Okay, after you escaped, where did you go?

Esther Loeb: We went to Poland, we came to Lodz where my sister was and we got united again.

Interviewer: Your sister left earlier?

Esther Loeb: My sister left Russia before. Yeah, she got married in Russia and she left earlier. So she was—

Interviewer: She ran away?

Esther Loeb: Yes, right, right. And we united in Poland which was also Russia too and then we looked for family and we looked, we couldn't find anybody. And we decided to go to Germany but you had to smuggle yourself through—

Interviewer: This was in '45?

Esther Loeb: This was in '45.

Interviewer: Okay.

Esther Loeb: That's right. So, my sister was all ready by that time, she was in Germany with her husband and my mother and I had to smuggle ourselves to Germany. So we went through Czechoslovakia, Prague and they caught us a couple of times and send us back and...but we finally made it. And we stayed in Landsberg am Lech in Germany for displaced persons. We stayed there for three years and I, naturally, since I wasn't married, my cousin was in Hagenau and he decided that...he really persuaded me to go to Israel.

Interviewer: Did you get in touch with some Jewish soldiers from the Jewish Brigade?

Esther Loeb: No.

Interviewer: What zone was this, where you were in Landsberg?

Esther Loeb: It was Landsberg am Lech, what do you mean zone?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, but who was there this time, the Americans or British?

Esther Loeb: No, it's the Americans, I guess, but it was German but the Americans...yes, under the Americans.

Interviewer: Yes I know but at the moment, there were zones.

Esther Loeb: Right, it was an American zone yes, but it was a displaced persons there.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Esther Loeb: Okay. That's when I went to Israel and my mother was—

Interviewer: You had a certificate from your relative in Israel I assume.

Esther Loeb: No, I have a couple of—I don't have nothing.

Interviewer: How did you get to Israel this time?

Esther Loeb: Well all right, okay.

Interviewer: So tell us about it.

Esther Loeb: Okay. We, I went...first of all, they took us to France, okay? And from France, they put us on small boats, and we travelled at night, and because in the daytime we were covered like a fisherman, you know, little boats and there were about a hundred of us. And it took us about a week and a half or more and we got to Haifa at night and that was in 1947 and in 19...it was beginning...I think it was in the end of 1947. And as soon as we came in, they took us and they...I mean, I became a soldier without realizing what...I didn't understand a word.

Interviewer: At this time, the British were not—

Esther Loeb: The British was still there. Yeah, they were still there.

Interviewer: And they didn't catch you?

Esther Loeb: No. No, no, no...they did not catch...we were lucky I guess. They didn't catch us.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Esther Loeb: They didn't catch us. And a few months after that, the British left and that's when the war started with the Arabs and I was in the army for two years and I was really from 1948 to 1950. I was discharged in 1950 and I lived in 1954 in Israel and I was really starving and hungry because at that time, they had...no comparison to what they have now. We had rations. As a matter of fact, I still have those little coupons that we used to get, a tiny little piece of meat once a week, a couple of eggs, a couple of eggs a

week, a little bit of sugar. And I remember my cousin which is now in Israel too.

Interviewer: Have you been working at this time?

Esther Loeb: Yes.

Interviewer: As a nurse?

Esther Loeb: I was working as a nurse in the operating room for two years in Haifa and it was [unintelligible 0:37:48.0] which is the Italian Hospital.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Esther Loeb: And after that, yes I worked. I was...all kind of things. I was a maid, I was a waitress, I was everything.

Interviewer: That's right.

Esther Loeb: To survive.

Interviewer: Yeah, to survive.

Esther Loeb: Right. And my mother came in 1950 to the United States. My sister was already here and mother wanted to come to Israel but I persuaded her to come to the United States.

Interviewer: And your sister was already in the United States?

Esther Loeb: My sister was already here, yes. And in 1954, I couldn't leave Israel because I was a nurse and they wouldn't let me out. So, I said I'm going...I hate to say that but I did say I'm going on vacation to Switzerland and I did go to Switzerland and I stayed there for six months not knowing if I get the papers to come to the United States but I lived at Switzerland for six months and my mother, bless her heart, supported me with her grocery money and I didn't eat nothing but just bread once a day. And I used to go—

Interviewer: Your mother was in the States.

Esther Loeb: My mother was in the United States.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Esther Loeb: And she used to send me a little bit of money to survive. And of course in Switzerland, you couldn't work so I had to go every week to the police station and report how I live and whatever. And they got to know me so every time I come in, they felt sorry for me and gave me sandwiches and chocolates and all kind of different things so I made friends. And after six months, I got papers to come to the United States and my mother, my sister, and good people of Nashville that helped me out, helped my mother out rather with money and send me a ticket.

Interviewer: How come that your...your sister was in Nashville when your mother came?

Esther Loeb: My sister...yes, she was in Nashville.

Interviewer: How come that she chose Nashville?

Esther Loeb: Well, she did not choose Nashville. She lived in Cincinnati and my mother lived in Nashville. They sent my mother—

Interviewer: How come that your mother came to Nashville?

Esther Loeb: I don't know, they just sent her to Nashville. I don't know what happened, how it happened. They just sent her to Nashville and that's where she came and she has been here since. And I came here in March 22nd of 1954 to the United States and of course, I had a six months visa, that's all. And I couldn't work.

Interviewer: How did you go around it?

Esther Loeb: Well, very simple. You mean around what?

Interviewer: You had only six months visa, you're still here.

Esther Loeb: Oh, well okay, for the six months, my mother had nothing and my sister was working in a factory, they had nothing and I was smoking at the time and I had nothing and I decide...I couldn't work so I had a friend in New York and she asked me...I asked if she needs my help, you know, just help her. She says sure. So, when I was a maid there for six months and I made little money and I could afford to give me a pack of cigarettes or whatever. And then I got the papers so I have to go back to Israel and I went to Atlanta, Georgia to the American Consul, at that time, I did not

speak English at all, just a few...the main thing I said was no, I knew that. It's funny now when you think about it, but it wasn't funny at the time. And he told me that I have to go back and I had a translator because I spoke Hebrew at that time, perfect really. And he says, "Well okay, I'll give you a few more months but you have to go back, you're going have to go back to Israel." Well, it was sadness at home, I don't have to tell you that, it was really very, very sad and mother had a friend, a rabbi in Mobile and he came by and my sister said, why don't you go with him over there for just a little while and just get away, and that's how I met my husband. And that was in 1955 and I married him in 1955 and we just celebrated our 35th wedding anniversary. So, here I am, but I did have to leave the country. We did go to Canada and re-enter.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Esther Loeb: So he had a lot of problems too. I cost him pretty good penny too, but he was worth it and I'm worth it. So, they have good things and bad things, you take the good and the bad and you make the best of it.

Interviewer: Very good, we are very happy that you are happy here.

Esther Loeb: I am, very much so.

Interviewer: Because you really deserve after what you went through.

Esther Loeb: Well thanks.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that you might remember from the time? I had been...not in Russia—

Esther Loeb: Right.

Interviewer: But after...and people we knew from Russia, they had been through the same thing.

Male: Okay, we're rolling.

Interviewer: Okay. Have you been at one time in Germany here? Yeah, you had been in Landsberg.

Esther Loeb: Yes.

Interviewer: How long had you been there?

Esther Loeb: I had been there since 1945 and in the end of 1947.

Interviewer: And you had, of course, at this time, help from the American Joint Distribution Committee?

Esther Loeb: Yes.

Interviewer: And did you have also...did you have children there?

Esther Loeb: No.

Interviewer: They were only adults. So you didn't have any preparation for hachshara to go to Israel?

Esther Loeb: No.

Interviewer: No.

Esther Loeb: No.

Interviewer: Have you been since, back to Germany?

Esther Loeb: No, and I have no desire to go to Germany at all, not at all.

Interviewer: Have you been to Poland?

Esther Loeb: No desire whatsoever, none. Although my niece did go to Poland and she did see—

Interviewer: But what...who?

Esther Loeb: My niece, my sister's daughter and she did see our house and she does have a picture of it and it brought back a lot of memories from our childhood. We had a great life. It was a great life, we had a wonderful family but in all that great life, we had bad things happen to us because I remember when I used to go to school, I was pointed at, picked at, beaten up and just because I was Jewish. So, some good things and bad

things but we got used to it. It seemed like you accepted it. You had no choice but accept. You couldn't fight back, although you wanted to but you couldn't.

Interviewer: Where was it? In Bydgoszcz?

Esther Loeb: It was in Bydgoszcz, yes.

Interviewer: Tell me, what do you...how did you find the time when the wall between East and West Berlin was coming down?

Esther Loeb: Well I thought about that, and I don't believe in unification.

Interviewer: You don't believe or you don't want it?

Esther Loeb: I don't want to. I am petrified. I am scared. And I believe, I hope I'm wrong a million times, but I believe that if a thing like this happens, it's going to be start all over again, the same old story.

Interviewer: You think that the spirit of Hitler is still alive?

Esther Loeb: Absolutely, absolutely and it's a funny thing, I remember when I first came to the United States and I was here a few months. They invited me to talk at the Golden Ages on Broad. I didn't speak good English at all but I had a translator and I was telling them what happened. They looked at me, these ladies looked at me and they did not believe me. They thought I was quoting a book. They didn't even know what was happening and I was shocked.

Interviewer: Don't you feel now that we really owe to...that it is our obligation to spread the word and to do this, what we are doing in order for the world to find out what was and what can unfortunately happen again?

Esther Loeb: We owe the world nothing. We owe the people that died, they're the one we owe.

Interviewer: You don't feel that we owe the people who lived, to let them know what happened that it will not happen again?

Esther Loeb: You're misquoting me. We owe the people that died, they died for us to live and if we forget them, then we forgot everything.

Interviewer: Okaynd after us, after we will be gone?

Esther Loeb: Our children, this should be for our...for us, our children, and our children's children, that's true but we...what do we owe the world? The world does not owe us nothing.

Interviewer: No, but we owe the world to let them know that it can happen again, don't you feel it like this?

Esther Loeb: Well, I feel...well, I feel...yes, anyway, I do but maybe I translate it wrong. But I feel that we owe the people that have died. That we owe it to them to let everybody know, not the world, that's the way I feel.

Interviewer: Sorry, I agree with you that we cannot forget the people who died. I agree with you—

Esther Loeb: No. It's because of them that we're doing this.

Interviewer: That's right.

Esther Loeb: It's because of them that we talk about.

Interviewer: That's right but we have to.

Esther Loeb: Right.

Interviewer: We have to do it because—

Esther Loeb: Right, they should not be forgotten and we should never forget them. Otherwise, they'd be lost—

Interviewer: You were not surprised when you came to the States how little people knew about what happened?

Esther Loeb: Right. That's true but if...well, that's what I'm trying to say but you have to remember about the dead people, to talk about.

Interviewer: No, of course.

Esther Loeb: That's what I went through and you went through. That's nothing because they are dead and we talk about it. They cannot say it.

Interviewer: I understand what you mean.

Esther Loeb: Right.

Interviewer: I understand what you mean but we owed it to the living to let them know what happened in order that—

Esther Loeb: It should not be lost in vain. Yes, we owe it—

Interviewer: We'll see that it will not happen again.

Esther Loeb: Right, I agree with you too but we still owe it to these dead people, to these people that never had a chance to survive, to these people that died, that are gone. We owe it to them too, definitely.

Interviewer: Absolutely.

Esther Loeb: Right.

Interviewer: But we owe this one, who are not even born yet.

Esther Loeb: Yes.

Interviewer: To remember the one that died.

Esther Loeb: That's true, that is right.

Interviewer: So you said no, this is—

Esther Loeb: It's because of them we're telling our children.

Interviewer: That's right.

Esther Loeb: And our children to their children, otherwise they are lost in vain.

Interviewer: I hope that it will continue.

Esther Loeb: I hope so too, I hope to God.

Interviewer: Because we are doing everything possible to do it.

Esther Loeb: Well, we do and try anyway.

Interviewer: Yeah. You said that you were talking to the Golden Ages.

Esther Loeb: Yes.

Interviewer: Have you been talking somewhere else?

Esther Loeb: No, I have not because I just couldn't take it, to be honest with you. I just couldn't take it.

Interviewer: I can understand that.

Esther Loeb: And it's not something that you go out and want to talk about. It is said, I know when I watch TV sometimes and I see Hitler or the war and I don't want to watch it because I get so angry, I get so upset, I get...I get angry. I'm angry and I cry. And then my husband comes, honey, why do you watch it? It upsets you. I said, well maybe I'll see some face that I knew. Maybe I'll see a face, my aunt or my uncle or somebody.

Interviewer: When you came back to Bydgoszcz...

Esther Loeb: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you meet some people you knew?

Esther Loeb: When I came back to Bydgoszcz, I never came back...never came back--

Interviewer: No, but in Lodz, you knew some people when you went to--

Esther Loeb: No.

Interviewer: No?

Esther Loeb: No.

Interviewer: Did your mother meet somebody she knows?

Esther Loeb: My mother could have, yes, she probably did, yes, and they were also survivors like we were and also lost families. The majority of them lost their families. They were just individuals that maybe survived...there was not a family that survived altogether.

Interviewer: You know, I lived all my life until the war in Lodz and I did not see one familiar face after I came back.

Esther Loeb: Isn't that something. Well, my mother was born, I was born there, my sister was born there.

Interviewer: Yeah. No, but they were children when you left.

Esther Loeb: Yes.

Interviewer: Yeah. I don't want to go into politics.

Esther Loeb: Well...

Interviewer: I think this will be fine. I thank you very much.

Esther Loeb: It was my pleasure.

Interviewer: You gave us much information.

Esther Loeb: Well, whatever little I could.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Esther Loeb: Thank you.