

**Transcript:**

Ella Silber

A27

13m10s

Ella Silber: No.

Interviewer: --talk about it. Well, thank you for coming down and thank you for sharing with us.

Ella Silber: You're welcome.

Interviewer: I appreciate it. If you could, could you tell us a little bit about Lithuania and growing up and where you were prewar.

Ella Silber: Prewar, it was natural. I had freedom. We did everything we could and we liked to do.

Interviewer: And I see you have...how many brothers and sisters?

Ella Silber: I had 3 brothers.

Interviewer: Three brothers.

Ella Silber: But nobody survived.

Interviewer: Nobody survived. What did your parents do?

Ella Silber: They were all in business.

Interviewer: Business.

Ella Silber: Yes.

Interviewer: What type of business?

Ella Silber: I don't...I've never seen here in Memphis this kind of business. We...I don't know how to say it. They had....when you cut the wool from the sheep...I don't know.

Interviewer: Was it weaving or...?

Ella Silber: We weave to make it for people to make it... wool or something but we didn't do the [unintelligible] we just put the wool in a....

Interviewer: So they can make...

Ella Silber: Yeah. I don't know how to explain here because I've never seen it here.

Interviewer: Now you were...and you were born at '24.

Ella Silber: Yes, that's right.

Interviewer: So, you were 13, 14, 15?

Ella Silber: When the war started?

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Ella Silber: No, I was about 17, almost 17.

Interviewer: Seventeen.

Ella Silber: Yeah.

Interviewer: Were your brothers older or younger than you?

Ella Silber: I had one older and 2 younger ones.

Interviewer: Could you tell me a little bit about when you knew that...what did you know about the war? I mean how old were you when you first...?

Ella Silber: We did not. The Germans came into Lithuania in 1941. There was some people who came in 1940 before this, only Lithuanians and the Russians took over Lithuania in 1940. So, when the Germans took over at '41, we didn't know anything, what to expect. We didn't think this to expect what the Germans will do.

Interviewer: You haven't heard anything about the Germans?

Ella Silber: No. We hear some gossip, you know, through the radio that they came in before in Poland. So, we heard but if you don't see it, you don't believe it. But they came in and then and it was hell.

Interviewer: Could you...could you tell me how...I mean do you remember the day that you moved to the ghetto?

Ella Silber: It was 1941. I don't remember the date. First, we were in Lithuania put it up in barracks and they kept us there, my family. And then, they took us back to the ghetto. We came to the Kovno ghetto there.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about that day, the day that took you to the ghetto?

Ella Silber: Well, they came in. We didn't know what to expect but we had to wear yellow and the sign of David. And we thought we're going to work or something else. We didn't expect anything else. In the ghetto, we had to go and they took me to work out of the ghetto and at night, I came back to the ghetto and I was with my mother and 3 brothers and we stayed in the house with another family [unintelligible 3:92] and that's all. Everyday, we had to work.

Interviewer: What kind of work was it?

Ella Silber: All kind of labor, manual labor. All kinds, really hard labor, but I was young, so I could manage. It was hard.

Interviewer: Was...did they had to do with the inside work or outside?

Ella Silber: No, outside, outside of the ghetto. They took us every morning and march to the work place and unload some materials or something else, to dig ditches or something.

Interviewer: So, just whatever that day that they--

Ella Silber: Whatever that day they gave us to do, we had to do it.

Interviewer: And how long were you on the ghetto?

Ella Silber: In the ghetto, it was about 3 years and I was taken away from my family and sent to a concentration camp.

Interviewer: After the 3 years.

Ella Silber: After the 3 years and I've never seen my family again. I mean they liquidated the ghetto, probably all were killed.

Interviewer: And you never saw your brothers?

Ella Silber: Never saw them again and never heard from them.

Interviewer: How were you...how were you taken to the camp?

Ella Silber: To the concentration camp?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Ella Silber: They took us in trains and they went to Stuttof in Germany and then to Dachau. There we worked for almost about 2 years until the war was over. But the last days of the war, we had to get out from the barracks and they didn't tell us anything just get ready and [get started. 5:11] They gave us a piece of bread and a can of soup and we had to march. We marched the whole day and at night, we took...they tell us to take a nap in the barracks and we woke up and we heard the noise and we looked up and we didn't see any soldiers and the American army came in.

Interviewer: And that was after 2 years.

Ella Silber: Yes.

Interviewer: After 2 years.

Ella Silber: Yes, when the war was over.

Interviewer: Okay. when you woke up that morning and you looked down and you didn't see any of the German soldiers--

Ella Silber: Yes we were so--

Interviewer: --did you felt right away that you were free or...?

Ella Silber: We thought so, yeah, and we were surprised we didn't see any Nazis there. And then we saw a limousine with American soldiers. So, I understood that the war was over. And we couldn't believe that, it was a miracle because the march, that's what when we thought we march to our deaths.

Interviewer: How many...how long did the march you?

Ella Silber: A whole day until it got dark, in the morning the whole day until it got really dark. And then, they told us to stop here and we were so tired and we fall asleep in the floor. When we woke up, we didn't see any Nazis, nobody. We didn't know what's going on and all of a sudden, we heard a noise and we run out and we saw some American soldiers. So, we understood we were free.

Interviewer: What a wonderful day.

Ella Silber: It sure was a surprise. We couldn't believe it.

Interviewer: Where did you go from there?

Ella Silber: They had the camp for displaced persons and they kept us there and the agencies from America helped us, gave us food and clothing because we didn't have anything. And we stayed there for 2 years. We were free so we didn't complain. And then I got married there in '45 and we moved to Munich.

Interviewer: So, you met your husband in the camp?

Ella Silber: Yeah, he was liberated too in the same place. I didn't know him before.

Interviewer: That's wonderful and you were married in the camp?

Ella Silber: Yes. In displaced camp, yeah, after the war.

Interviewer: And then you were...and so you were there for 2 years and then you were moved to...?

Ella Silber: To Munich.

Interviewer: To Munich?

Ella Silber: Munich, Germany, and we had an apartment there and then I met my relative. He was looking for relatives. He was from America. He was a soldier and his mother was a cousin to my father and she asked him to look for relatives who survived. And they find out if...he looks for aunts and uncle and cousins, and somebody told him only one from the families survived. So, I met him but I couldn't speak English and he couldn't speak my language. So, and I didn't know who he was but I knew by cousins I had in America and then I got a letter from [his mother 8:16] who explained who he was so I knew what he did. And then they asked us if we like to come to America and I said, "Of course." So, he sponsored us. In '49, we came here.

Interviewer: That's wonderful. Did you have children with him?

Ella Silber: Yeah, I had one daughter in Munich. I got her in Munich in '47. So, when we came to America, she was a year and a half. The three, the others are still at Memphis.

Interviewer: So, you went straight to Memphis from...?

Ella Silber: From Germany, in Munich, yes.

Interviewer: What did your...what did your husband do here?

Ella Silber: He was a [painter 8:55] and then he got in business, in dry cleaning business.

Interviewer: Now, speaking to you earlier, you said you had how many children?

Ella Silber: Four daughters.

Interviewer: Four daughters.

Ella Silber: Yeah.

Interviewer: And how many grandchildren?

Ella Silber: Five.

Interviewer: Five grandchildren?

Ella Silber: Yeah, five grandchildren.

Interviewer: That's wonderful.

Ella Silber: Yeah.

Interviewer: It's amazing. Do you have anything you like to add that we haven't talked about?



Ella Silber: I don't know if...I don't know what to...

Interviewer: What do you want people to know about your experience?

Ella Silber: To learn what has happened to us so it will never happen again. This hatred, I don't know what happened. One nation hates another one or a religion, or I don't know what's the matter.

Interviewer: Do you ever think about why that happened?

Ella Silber: I couldn't find out why. I just couldn't understand it why people can be so cruel.

Interviewer: What helped you to survive, the camp experience?

Ella Silber: It's some miracle, I guess. If it lasted maybe a few more days, I wouldn't be here because we were marching to our deaths but they didn't have time to kill us.

Interviewer: But you stayed in the camp for 2 years.

Ella Silber: In the concentration camp.

Interviewer: And when you were in the camp, how did you survive that?

Ella Silber: We worked very hard and we survived. I don't know how we survived. It was very bad in the camp that we had hard labor that we had to work very hard and no food and we slept in barracks, just like the wooden barracks and no clothes and no sheets and no pillowcases. Our clothes was our pillowcases and very little food. But I think we were young and strong and we survived. Not many people survived.

Interviewer: You think your faith had anything to do with it?

Ella Silber: Maybe it helped, I don't know. I don't know what happened. Maybe it was a miracle, I don't know.

Interviewer: Were you religious at the time?

Ella Silber: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you consider yourself?

Ella Silber: Yes, I was religious.

Interviewer: Did you ever wrestle with feelings about where God was during that time?

Ella Silber: No. We didn't...we were so mixed up we didn't know what to think about what happened to us because we didn't...we didn't believe all of those stories. We didn't believe. But after that, we were still alive but we didn't know what it's gonna be tomorrow.

Interviewer: Have you talked about your experience much?

Ella Silber: I really don't like to talk about it. I remember everything but it is hard for me to talk about it.

Interviewer: Why did you decide to come here?

Ella Silber: I don't know why because I feel... [unintelligible 0:11:55] and I didn't go. I said, I can't do it. But the next time, I felt guilty not to say anything. So, I said, I might as well try to go.

Interviewer: I appreciate it very much for you to come here.

Ella Silber: Yeah, you should know. Everybody should know what happened to us and we almost...we're all getting old and pretty soon, nobody will be left here. So, maybe the people should know what happened to us.

Interviewer: Have you spoke with your family much about it, your...?

Ella Silber: If they asked me, I tell them. Otherwise, I just don't tell them.

Interviewer: Do they know?

Ella Silber: Well, my children? Yeah, they know and my daughter filled it out and she didn't have a form. My granddaughter took copies from there so she had taken in school and she might need it for his story. I don't know. If they ask I tell them. Otherwise...

Interviewer: It's hard.

Ella Silber: It's hard for me to talk.

Interviewer: Do you have anything else to ask?

Interviewer: It's an honor to have you out here. It's our honor to help you tell people.

Ella Silber: I think people should know what happened.