

Matilda Goodfriend

A04

23m03s

Interviewer: You were in Auschwitz three to four weeks?

Matilda Goodfriend: Maybe longer, I don't remember exactly how long. But not too long, just enough to see the miseries and to lose my parents and my brothers...just long enough.

Interviewer: How old were your sisters?

Matilda Goodfriend: My oldest sister was three years older, she was 22. My youngest sister was 15.

Interviewer: You were transported to where?

Matilda Goodfriend: We were transported to southern Germany, called Geislingen in Württemberg. It was an ammunition factory, and we were working there for about seven or eight month, and then it was bombed. During the air raids we were in the shelters, and when we were in camp we had to stay inside when we were at the factory. We went to a shelter, and one Sunday we were in the camp and it was a long, long air raid and we heard bombs falling in the background. And then the following day we did not go to work anymore, but we were not told, we just heard rumors that the factory was burned. So we stayed in camp and it just went from bad to worse because the factory sent us our food into the camp and we did not work so they cut our food in half and as little as we got, cut it in half was even worse. And then Germany became smarter and smarter, as [unintelligible0:02:25] came in—we got more people coming into

our camp from other concentration camps and we had to share our food with them. So it just got real bad.

Interviewer: What do you think your strongest memory was at that time?

Matilda Goodfriend: The strongest memory? That we took care of each other, everybody helped one another, with excess food if we had any, which we didn't, with taking care of each other. I think that's the strongest memory. And the friendships that we...the bonding with each other.

Interviewer: I'm a descendant of Hungarian survivors and victims. My family is from Budapest. What I've been told from the Hungarian survivors, is that their greatest source of pain and anger came not from the Nazis but from their Hungarian countrymen. Do you understand that?

Matilda Goodfriend: Yes. From our neighbors you mean?

Interviewer: Right.

Matilda Goodfriend: Yes, but see our neighbors were not Hungarian, though some of them were, but our neighbors were Ruthanians, they were called native people that live there and...

Interviewer: What were they called again I'm sorry.

Matilda Goodfriend: Ruthanian.

Interviewer: Ruthanians?

Matilda Goodfriend: Ruthanian and they could hardly wait for us to leave, to go.

Interviewer: Did you feel that sense of betrayal by your neighbors?

Matilda Goodfriend: Oh yes, definitely. Because before we were taken away, the food was rationed, there was a war going on, we all had sacrifices to make. But food was rationed and we, the Jews, got half the rations that the other people got. So we had to go to the neighbors to help us out with corn meal or potatoes or whatever we could. And some...they were supposed to be such good neighbors, didn't care. When we got back, I remember my younger sister and I went to one of the neighbors, and she promised she'll give us some milk and corn meal. She welcomed us and we sat down and my sister said to me, "No those are our chairs," they were sitting in and I turn to my neighbor and I said, "Oh I'm so glad so you got our chairs." And she got so angry, "No, those are not your chairs," she said. "We did not take nothing from you. We don't want nothing from you, now get out of my house." That was our welcome home. They did not want us back, they were very glad to get rid of us. As soon as we left they attacked our homes and stole everything inside. There was [unintelligible 0:06:46.6]. So yes, we were betrayed. And I can tell you so many instances...that we had a neighbor, a young couple had a two year old little boy...

Interviewer: It's okay

Matilda Goodfriend: And they had property outside the town, they had a lot of property and they have a caretaker of that property, and they told that caretaker, "Keep my boy," a two-year-old, "And if he survives we'll come back, we'll give you half of the property. If we don't come back then all of it will be yours just keep the boy." The father and the mother, miraculously, they both of them survive. They came back, we'd seen the father came back, we were taken in April and the father came back in October of the same year. He went to get his boy, the boy was dead they killed him. I'm sorry.

Interviewer: No, don't be.

Matilda Goodfriend: I'm all right now.

Interviewer: Take your time.

Matilda Goodfriend: Okay, you have more questions?

Interviewer: Tell me where you were around the time of liberation.

Matilda Goodfriend: We were from Geislingen. After the factory was bombed we stayed in the camp for a while, and then that was sometime in February of 1945. And we stayed there until sometime mid-March probably, did nothing. And then we were taken by train to Dachau and we stayed in Dachau for three-four weeks, and that was real bad because we did not get any real food. Once a day we got some soup and we didn't do any work in Dachau. Once in a while they will take us out on...there was not far railroad tracks and grassy hills, and to pick edible grass and that grass was cooked into some kind of soup for us, that was our food. And then again from Dachau we were taken by train and I don't know where we were suppose to go with the train, but wherever we went we were cut off because the Allies were closing in on Germany. And one day there was long air raid and we were supposed to be inside the train and then all of a sudden we heard, "The Americans are here, the Americans are here." And we were just on a railing outside...

Interviewer: Sorry.

Matilda Goodfriend: Wouldn't it better over here?

Interviewer: It would be too close right there. See if that works.

Matilda Goodfriend: We were outside of this town, I don't know what the town was called, and the train and going over, sitting there for two days. And

one day the Swiss Red Cross came through and told us to have patience, that it won't last much longer, just to have patience and gave us a care package each of us. And then about two days later we heard shouting, "Americans! Americans!" And there were soldiers running by the train and picking up the guards with their hands up. We noticed the day before that the guards did not pick up their rifles. So we did not know what was going on, but then the Americans came and they did not know what to do with us. They said, "Stay put we'll send somebody for you." But the first thing we did was run to the front of the train and broke into the car where the food was stored, got some food and we did not wait for anything, we just went into town. And the following day we were rounded up by the Americans and taken to a camp that used to be a Nazi officers' recreation camp. And who needed medical help, there was food for us and we still wore our striped uniforms but slowly, slowly we started to hear what's going on in other camp. The war was still going on though, the war was not over yet. We just heard on the radio that Prague was calling for help and there fighting was going on and we were free already. Then we went from camp to camp, Czechoslovakia claimed their city and we came back home. We find nothing and nobody. We really did not know the extent of what was going on until it was over and that was with...

Interviewer: When did you come to America?

Matilda Goodfriend: After the war, my sisters and I stayed at home for a while. And one of my uncles, my mother's brother, survived, and he said to come and live with him, he lived in Romania. So we stayed with him for a couple of weeks, but that part of Romania became very communistic, so we did not want to stay, and we went to Czechia, a part of Czechoslovakia, and lived there for a while until 1948 when Israel got liberated. And then I went to Israel, my younger sister went with [unintelligible 0:16:59.2] to Israel the year before and I went in 1948. And my older sister got married in Czechoslovakia and she came to Israel a year later.

Interviewer: What brought you to Tennessee?

Matilda Goodfriend: I got married in Israel and my husband had relatives in Athens, Tennessee. When we got married he told me that he has relatives here in the United States but he hasn't written to them yet that he survived. So we wrote a letter and we got a response and we started to correspond. And they told us if we want to come they will help us to come here, and Israel wasn't the best of places to live at that time. That was during 1956 Sinai war when my husband almost got killed. So we picked up and came. We had already one child and I was pregnant with my daughter and we settled in Athens, Tennessee and live there for 15 years and then came to Knoxville, have been here ever since.

Interviewer: How do you get through the memories?

Matilda Goodfriend: Excuse me?

Interviewer: How do you get through the memories?

Matilda Goodfriend: Just keep on going.

Interviewer: What did you leave with? What did you leave emotionally with?  
How do you tell people what happened?

Matilda Goodfriend: Well I just...I used to go to schools, high schools and middle schools, and talked to the children and just tell them the story and tell them to remember that holocaust did happen. That nobody can tell you it didn't. We could remember it and we are dying out, and we are getting old and dying, and then therefore we leave the remembering for the younger generation, and I hope that they all remember it. I pray to God that it never happens again.

Interviewer: You said I pray to God, how was your—how was your strength found?

Matilda Goodfriend: I don't know how to answer that. We were brought up in a very religious home and I guess that fortified us...and just kept hoping and if there is no hope there is no life, and as long as there is life there is hope. And so we just keep hoping and praying that tomorrow it will be better and we went on from day to day.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Matilda Goodfriend: That's it?

Interviewer: Uh-huh. If there's anything else you'd like to talk about or add we can do that.

Matilda Goodfriend: I cannot think of anything.

Interviewer: I'm available to call at anytime, you know my phone number is on your letter, on your information. You'll get another follow up letter in a little while and it will also have that. You can call me at anytime if there's anything you think of. I will be calling you as we're going through this to confirm maybe some dates, locations, making sure I have everything correct. Has your photograph already been taken?

Matilda Goodfriend: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. The exhibit we're hoping will be on show in next year. It will be in all four major cities. It will be a permanent fixture. We don't know exactly where in Knoxville but it will be a permanent fixture of a museum. So our goal is every school in Tennessee will have access to learning about the holocaust.

Matilda Goodfriend: That will be good because schools keep calling me. I just can't do it anymore, I just quit going to school but they keep calling me.

Interviewer: It's okay.

Matilda Goodfriend: Okay, thank you.

Interviewer: You take all the time you need, to sit if you'd like to. I can get you anything.