

Elizabeth Limor
A46
48min

Interviewer: Tell me where you grew up, a little bit about--?

Elizabeth Limor: I grew up in Poland. First, let me tell you who I am. I am a victim who eventually became a survivor and I am a witness, but I also am a victor. Where do I look?

Interviewer: You can look at me.

Elizabeth Limor: At you?

Interviewer: Uh-hmm.

Elizabeth Limor: Okay. I grew up in Poland. I really grew up til age of six when my father passed away in riches, but the riches eventually at that time when I was twelve became poverty. My mother didn't know how to run father's business and that's what happened. My brother who studied in France became a chemist, lived in France. He was what...20, 22 when we had the hardest time. My sister, a divorcee and mother and I lived in a small apartment. My sister and my mother, they were knitting beautiful sweaters. Handmade sweaters with the design just came in style and they did this but the life was very, very poor for us. You couldn't make a living of it. My mother was one of five children. My uncle had one daughter and my mother had three and this was all. The other two aunts did not have children. One of them was very well to do and she was helping out. It was poverty. The worst part happened when I had to go to a private gymnasium because [unintelligible 0:02:33.0], if you know what [unintelligible 0:02:34.3] is? Of the good standing, the [unintelligible 0:02:38.6]. Father had the only silk store in town. Since trousers were made to order, this was a very good business. My mother did not know, didn't have contact with the deliverers, so father used to go to Germany and was in contact. Mother had no idea. The business went down and when the aunt who did not have children but could help, she helped. She wanted to buy me a machine to make hose for sale. I was gifted in drawing and designing clothes and this was the only thing I wanted to be, which eventually in the year before the war, I studied dress designing and this is what I became, which also helped me to survive the war days. At the age of 17, the war broke out and...

Interviewer: Do you remember what happened?

Elizabeth Limor: We, young people, not only run but were sent by families. "Save your life. We will stay here. We cannot go but the older one, you go out." And so we started a group of us seven. I don't remember. I think three boys and four girls. I don't remember anymore. Anyhow...

Interviewer: Let me back you up just a second. Tell me about Kristallnacht, what you remember.

Elizabeth Limor: I had nothing to do with Kristallnacht. I even did not know that there was Kristallnacht. I am born in Poland.

Interviewer: Right. No, but I know that there were people that heard about it.

Elizabeth Limor: No. No. Yes, I found out after the war. The beatings...

Interviewer: So you didn't know anything about it at that time.

Elizabeth Limor: No.

Interviewer: You haven't heard anything.

Elizabeth Limor: No. People in Germany, who were from Germany will tell you. No. I was...

Interviewer: So you never heard anything?

Elizabeth Limor: Which year was it?

Interviewer: In 1939.

Elizabeth Limor: Yeah. No, I was running towards the Russian side.

Interviewer: So you had heard nothing.

Elizabeth Limor: Nothing. We didn't have papers and definitely, Germans would not advertise it. Anyhow so we went away. We hoped that we will reach Romania and this was really mostly on foot. At night, we were looking for shelter. The best shelter we found was one night on an oven in a bakery. It was warm and cozy and we lay on top of the oven, which was built of bricks, whatever. So this is the pleasure that we had, one night that we could rest well. We hoped that we will go through Romania and from there we will be able somehow to go to the United States. Very nice dream. It never came true. I landed in [unintelligible 0:06:22.5] which--

Interviewer: Can we stop you really quick? Who were you with at this time? Were you with your--

Elizabeth Limor: As I said there are seven people.

Interviewer: So all of you, your parents, everybody.

Elizabeth Limor: All of us. We landed in a city that at the moment was occupied by Russia, a Polish city. We started to...we wanted to make a life. We got one room and we went to the market. We bought an electric unit and then we started a life which we girls bought from I think, peasants. It was wool, home-spun from the animals they had. There was angora from the rabbits and wool from sheep. And it was very rough yarn, but we knit it on big needles and it went one-two and we traded it with other peasants. We went to the market, we trade it. We started to make a living. We found crates that were our chairs and we had...Oh, I wrote it in my book. And they're really and truly... The things that were very hard on my soul I got writ with the book and now I don't have to remember it anymore. When I want to know, I read it. Anyhow, people are like this. People try to forget the bad time. But I definitely know when I talk especially to young people I tell them, "Write down because it's important, whatever you think. If you have some bad memories or you have misunderstanding with your parents, write it down because this will cure your soul that is always overloaded." So this is what happened during the war. So I was not in a ghetto. I saw the movie, The Pianist recently. I became very cool about the Holocaust. It was...I had a new life and the life was good to me. I had a wonderful husband. The other was another chapter of my life. And when I read now, very seldom or I hear, I am cool. I don't especially go to look for movies, but The Pianist was some say they wanted to see because I read about it. Have you seen it?

Interviewer: Not yet.

Elizabeth Limor: I who am cool, if I would not view with this friend, I would not be able to get up from the chair because there is the story of his -- the story is exactly like mine, with the beating, with the treatment, but one thing, I was lucky enough to live through. I was never...no, not never, a time I was few days in a small ghetto. I was not in a ghetto. And this man there in the movie, is alone. The ghetto does not exist anymore and he's hungry and he's cold and he's alone. I was lucky that during the hardest time, I never was alone. If I got a beating, somebody else got too. Friends, we have been together and I must say that this is one thing that really kept us going, that we were together.

Interviewer: Was it always someone you knew?

Elizabeth Limor: I don't hear.

Interviewer: Was it always someone that you knew that you were with?

Elizabeth Limor: No.

Interviewer: People that you met?

Elizabeth Limor: No. We made, you know, acquaintances. I have a friend who is six years older than me who lost a husband and a child and we became friends for life. She is in Israel now and we're still very close.

Interviewer: So you are with your family. You were with your family?

Elizabeth Limor: No.

Interviewer: Were you left off is what I'm saying. Were you left off? You were with your family?

Elizabeth Limor: Yeah.

Interviewer: OK. You were trading at the market. Then tell me what happened.

Elizabeth Limor: And then it was, I believe the 5th of November if I am not mistaken. They came September the 3rd; the army came into our city and was extremely rough treatment. They didn't beat yet, but they screamed at us. We lived in an apartment house, a block that had one big gate. Of course, the gate was closed and they started to knock. Knock, knock. Knock, knock, knock. They started to scream, "Open the gate." The gate was opened by the janitor and maybe sixteen apartments in the house. And they started to go from apartment to apartment and check, "Where are the men?" It's true that in the beginning of the war all men tried to escape. Where do you go? Really, when I think about it, where do you go? But run. Run. They had their way to catch on us and they saw a picture of my father who was deceased, what, eleven years before. And they said, "Where is he?" "He is not alive." They didn't take. They wanted a small interrogation, but the tone of voice, this was terrible. This was terrible. They didn't beat us yet, but the superiority. You knew that you will not have a good treatment in the future.

Interviewer: You were how old at this time?

Elizabeth Limor: I'm seventeen.

Interviewer: Seventeen. Did you have any understanding of what was happening to you at that time other than there was just a lot of violence?

Elizabeth Limor: People were debating, the short war, not more than five weeks for sure.

And the Poles...I tell you, I have nothing to do with Poles and I didn't have good memories. My country is America. This is where I am most of my life, but I never would go back to Poland. I never had the desire or my husband to show Poland to the children. We traveled a lot, but we never go to Poland or Germany. A matter of fact, we were to go to South Africa and our travel agent told us a day before that we are going to fly, I don't know what trip it was really, fly over Germany in Lufthansa. My husband said, "Lufthansa? Forget about it. We are not going." And we didn't.

Interviewer: Wow.

Elizabeth Limor: We didn't because we didn't want anything German by...ever which is, you know, maybe not right. It depends at times. They are supposed to be our friends, but it is in the blood.

Interviewer: So you were trading at the market. They came looking for the men.

Elizabeth Limor: Yeah. Of course, they didn't find. When they found, they took the men to do heavy work. We all were later on. This was the first day of work, but later on they also took women to work, but sometimes they...how shall I say? The work was really not needed, but they gave you a toothbrush and told you to clean with the toothbrush, the sidewalk just to show you that you are nobody and you do what we say. The main idea was to feel us subhuman. And the dehumanizing was through all the war, good or bad. Eventually, I think it was in the second...yeah, we established ourselves in [unintelligible 0:17:33.] and I was working in dress factory, Russian or Ukrainian operated. I and a friend rented an apartment and more or less we made living. We went also once a while...we didn't make much money, but once in a while, we could afford to go to a restaurant. It was more or less a normal life. Then I decided I have to see my mother and sister. So I will try to go back to Poland...not to Poland, to the part that was occupied by the German. I have to go there.

Interviewer: You haven't heard from your mother?

Elizabeth Limor: No.

Interviewer: You hadn't talked to her at all?

Elizabeth Limor: No, but I knew from people who came after us. We met people that my mother and aunt and my sister went to Warsaw. I am from Łódź, which was second biggest city. And that my mother is in Warsaw, so I hired a smuggler who was supposed to get me to Warsaw, but he gave a condition. I had no papers. No. None. Not false, not right, no papers. But he said, "We will go by train, but when I will wink to you..." we were not sitting at the same compartment. "When I will wink, I want you to know that this

is where we got off.” And it happened like this. I have forty minutes time.

Interviewer: You said forty or fourteen?

Elizabeth Limor: Forty.

Interviewer: Forty?

Elizabeth Limor: Yeah. In the train, in another compartment, but we heard. The compartment have walls, two soldiers spoke. “You know there in this compartment is a Jew. Let’s get him.” I did not blush. I didn’t pale. There was somebody else. I hope they didn’t talk about me. I think, today, I wouldn’t have the courage without paper to be really alone because it was in somewhere else, but who cared? He didn’t get care about their life. He didn’t care about tomorrow. To make the story short, he winked, we went out. It was a small ghetto, which I was for a few days, I don’t remember how many. When selection came, trucks came – there was really no selection. I think maybe five hundred people were there. The trucks came. Where do we go? Are we going for work or are we going for death? Nobody knows. We arrived in a field. It was Skarzysko was the name of the place. We didn’t know what we will be doing there. They just let us out in a field and commanded us that the Nazis were all over. The sturmfuhrer and of course, the black coats. Gestapo was there too. Send information. Ten, five, I don’t remember. We didn’t know what they want from us, but we thought like this. It was...I don’t remember what month it was, but it was very cold.

Interviewer: By this time, have you heard anything that was going on anywhere else in Europe?

Elizabeth Limor: Nothing.

Interviewer: Still knew nothing?

Elizabeth Limor: Nothing. Later on, you found out that there are people who worked for the underground. They knew, but they did not share with us common people. No. We not only didn't know, we were not interested. I don’t know “we.” I wasn’t interested. I talk about myself. I just wanted to work and go to sleep and work and go to sleep.

Interviewer: You hadn’t yet found your mother or your sister.

Elizabeth Limor: I did not find them or...

Interviewer: You were in the field?

Elizabeth Limor: And never came there. Of course I was very sad, but you had to take the day at a time. So we came there. We stood on so-called [unintelligible 0:23:17.3] where roll call was called every day. We ceased to be individuals. We got numbers. Til today when I go to school to talk and they hand me a number, a visiting guest, I feel very uncomfortable. If I recall, I was number 4319, which after the war, my husband and I made a little Magen David with the inscription because it's numbered. Anyhow, so we landed in Skarzysko and we stood in forms. And a little guy with his legs spread, shiny boots, uniform of course... "Who has good eye sight." Eighteen of us. No, he needs 18 for six machinery, three to a machine. "What machine?" We were the 18 people chosen who were taken to a factory. We then did not know how it works. There were two camps; one camp where we lived in barracks. Yeah, we were also given the number of barrack with the wooden bunk beds, three stories high and this was the commander too of this camp was in one hand, the factory was military. There are two different sects.

Interviewer: Right.

Elizabeth Limor: And both were called HASAG. It stood for something, which I never tried even to find out. Two years later, we were transferred to another city where my future husband was from. They took us to factory at this camp. They said, "You sit here," a long...how do we call that and, "God help you." He didn't say God. They did not believe, but if you let out the bad one.

Interviewer: Were you religious growing up?

Elizabeth Limor: No.

Interviewer: No.

Elizabeth Limor: But we were observant.

Interviewer: You were observant.

Elizabeth Limor: Yes, the family was observant.

Interviewer: Did you find yourself praying at this time trying to understand?

Elizabeth Limor: No, I don't pray today either.

Interviewer: You don't pray today either?

Elizabeth Limor: No.

Interviewer: So do you remember what you were thinking this time? What was happening?

Elizabeth Limor: I wasn't thinking. Who was thinking?

Interviewer: Well, I mean do you remember what you were trying to understand? Were you trying to find out what was...you were just doing what you're supposed to do and that was it?

Elizabeth Limor: No. We were zombies, some of us, most of us.

Interviewer: You're just getting up and doing your job?

Elizabeth Limor: Yeah. I knew that we live here and we have 12 hours to work and we will have change of shift, will be day. But let me tell you about the first day of work. After few hours of work, we were called to the master. He was really a master of our life. A small room, he stands there again with the uniform, the shiny boots, the legs spread, the hands on the hip. "You Jewish swines. You are sabotaging. You let the bad casing together with the good one." We didn't know what we do. Who of us has seen a casing of a bullet before? And he started to beat us, three of us from one machine. I lost this time 17 teeth. He hit so badly. He aimed really between the eyes. We were so beaten, three of us that words fail me to explain it. I tell you that I lost 17 teeth. I spit them out. And he send us back after, I don't know, probably half an hour treatment, but this was a lesson. We knew right away to put even when there was a mark on the...if we didn't know if it can go or not we put it with the bad ones. Then later on in the other camp, in Czestochowa, my husband was mechanically inclined and he was running a powder to put in the casing. He was sabotaging. I did not know it this time that he was connected with the underground. I did not know him really. I knew of him. He was a very respected young man and he could do some damage. We couldn't.

Interviewer: When you say sabotage, what was he doing?

Elizabeth Limor: Stop the machinery.

Interviewer: Stopping the machinery?

Elizabeth Limor: Yeah. "They broke something. I have to repair it"

Interviewer: And then he was...

Elizabeth Limor: So the machine did not work. He operated 10 machines.

Interviewer: Did they find out what he was doing? Did anyone find out what he was doing?

Elizabeth Limor: The master suspected because they said, "What is it now? What do you want now?" "No, I don't want anything," sometimes he said. When a woman was killed because the master took the girl and killed her, the machine stopped working, a machine or two or three, I don't remember. "What is it now?" "Nothing, I have to repair it." Okay. There was hunger. There was...

Interviewer: Excuse me one second.

Elizabeth Limor: Listen, ask questions because it never will end. No, seriously.

Interviewer: Sometimes I get...

Elizabeth Limor: When I start talking...

Interviewer: I want to just keep up with it.

Interviewer 2: We want to hear you.

Elizabeth Limor: There is a life story.

Interviewer 2: Absolutely.

Interviewer: And I do also have your book.

Elizabeth Limor: Huh?

Interviewer: And I do also have your book.

Elizabeth Limor: Take it from the book.

Interviewer: I will. I'm going to do both, talk to you and the book. Sometimes though what you say is so amazing. I want to get a better understanding of it.

Elizabeth Limor: But I really talk about what I put in the book. I have eight grandchildren but only one, maybe my granddaughter when her children will grow up, she will talk, but only one is interested and he said, "This is my legacy."

Interviewer: Okay. I had it on the wrong speed so now it's fixed.

Elizabeth Limor: And so what was I saying?

Interviewer: You were talking to me about your future husband was sabotaging the

machines.

Elizabeth Limor: Yeah. And when we were on night shift...yeah, of course, in order to have some food, the friend that I said that we became lifelong friends. She was a wife of a tailor and she knew how to sew and I was sewing. So the masters found out about it. Apparently, there was shortage in Germany of fabrics and so forth. They send clothing from Germany to their husbands, let's say and from two dresses you made one, all by hand. We didn't have needles. I think we traded with the Poles, thread. We didn't have thread, but every box of the bullet contained twelve small boxes of bullets of casing and it was hold by a fabric belt and we pulled the thread out of the belt and we sew by hand whatever. So mainly we made restoration of dresses or from two dresses we made one.

Interviewer: You did this all in secret?

Elizabeth Limor: Huh?

Interviewer: You did this all in secret?

Elizabeth Limor: No. No. No.

Interviewer: No?

Elizabeth Limor: No, in my free time. We have 12 hours free, which we didn't spend in the shower because shower we got once in few months. The lice ate us. This was the main thing what we did to kill the lice – everybody was sitting on the bunk bed, and getting the clothes that we wore and lice, lice, lice were our company. After the war, what we did when we work on machines, they gave us acetone and brought from burned factories fabrics, parts of clothing or they washed it and they brought to clean the machinery. From there, we found long john with one leg. Apparently the owner of it, his legs were blown away. And so I started to make hose. We had very cold winter. I had a friend who was bringing the schmattas, the rags in a box. So I always took what I could and took it and I made brassieres for the girls. They give me a piece of bread for it. But mainly, what we sew was for German masters' wives in Germany or a woman master. A woman master was the most lucrative because we sometimes got some cooked food, but this was some. But even if it was a piece of bread, it was a piece of bread. We were definitely not getting enough food. I can tell you once instance when we came the first day. Two men were carrying a kettle, you know a stick through the handles and soup. We were given sick, ugly looking containers and a wooden spoon and we are getting the soup. I looked at the soup. It was a gray substance with some pieces floating in it. The pieces look like beets only were gray. It was really horrible, but I ate it. And right around me were maybe twelve girls. "How can you eat it?" I

said, “You will not eat? We will starve.” This is how you made friendship. Giving example to live, wanting to live apparently, but there was no vivid “I want to live.” You take it as it comes. This you can take from the book really, the beating.

Interviewer: Okay, I’ll do that from the book.

Elizabeth Limor: Ask questions.

Interviewer: Tell me about liberation day.

Elizabeth Limor: We were really not liberated. We liberated ourselves. My husband whom I got to know the last day because the Germans disappeared, we knew that something is going on because they spoke with hushed tones to each other and the little whip that they had at their side was gone and they spoke and they disappeared and they came and disappeared. Something was going on. We heard the artillery through one window in the store room somebody went there and brought news. “Somewhere far fired.” So we knew that something is coming. And we took our belongings from the place that we were and...no, not yet. Yet, we were in the barracks. We were laying four on one...of course not covered with the ugly horse blanket, but waiting. What should we do? We lay on the bunk bed. Some Nazis came, “Out.” All of us from how many barracks there were, “Out.” Another order came, “Back to the barracks.” And so it was few times. Eventually, we were stood there in fives and this time was already, I talk to my husband because he was walking trying to avoid the Ukrainian who was posted by the German and they were rough. And he was walking with a group maybe sixteen people because he knew where to go. He knew the town. He knew the factory and the place that we lived. And he said to me...I was standing there with the blanket, the horrible blanket – this is a book by itself, the blanket – under my arm. And he saw a lonely girl standing. He was not 22 yet. I was 22 and he just became 22. Anyhow, he says, “Where are you going?” I said, “I don’t know.” “You have something to eat?” “No.” We have one bread for sixteen people. “Come with us.” There was one good master that broke the storeroom and threw in the masses when we were sending out bread. So we had one bread, so I went with them. And he knew where to hide. When we saw from far a Ukrainian, he went down to the factory, into the basement. He knew. He always was a leader. Anyhow, the Germans took us eventually out, all of us. I don’t know how many. And my husband said...I cannot talk to him as a husband because he was nothing to me then. But the leader said, “Not in the front. We are not in the front and not in the back. We are in the middle.” Sure enough, they took 500 people from the front and from the back. We were still there. This was the famous hunger march from Poland to Germany to Bergen-Belsen. On the way, people were dying. They were not fed so they ate some grass. The grass was already muddy

from all the tripping all night and the people were very sick. Diphtheria was the main thing that people were dying after being free. For us who were left there, I told you they took from the front and the back. We didn't know what's going on. We sat in the cold weather, on the bare ground and waited. Less and less we didn't see anybody, in the military. And my husband was one of a group of four I think that went out, opened the gate and went out and came back and said the Russians are in town. The men that were underground had the armband, the red armband, the militia. And we went to the kitchen where our friend, close friend was a cook and there was hot coffee, hot and black and we opened the gate. We liberated ourselves. Nobody was there to take care of us. We go out on the street. No, I have more time. We go out of the street and there is a guy – the streets were empty really – and he carries two suitcases and it was impossible not to recognize us because on our only clothes that we had was a big H in a red oil paint. We could not go undetected. This was in case if we wanted to run away. And he says, "I was always good to the Jews," and he's shaking and then the suitcases down. We have not been human enough to say, "Give us one of the suitcases." Not to touch and not to beat him. Why? We wouldn't do it. But it was really [unintelligible 44:57]. We were not human. We couldn't do it. There was of course quite a number of people, men that run to where they knew they will find the apartment of the high people, high hierarchy. And they overtook apartments with all that was in it, clothing and treasures and paintings that were supposed to be sent to Germany. I don't really talk chronologically, but one time I was in a group of people that cleaned the quarters of the high rank German in a hotel. So we cleaned it. We had to look neat. We were given good food because we were down in the kitchen to eat and they cooked for us a whole pot of any grain and I did not eat ever buckwheat at home, but my mother would be proud and happy to see how I ate with that appetite. The Polish waiters were good to us, which was the first time a Pole was good to us. And they put some gravy on this or they said that they have to bring three portions and they gave one portion to us.

Interviewer: Did you ever see your mother and your sister again?

Elizabeth Limor: Never.

Interviewer: Never. You never did know where they went?

Elizabeth Limor: The tale was they were killed in Treblinka. And you didn't have to whom to talk about it, but they know that the transport went to Treblinka.

Interviewer: What I'm going to do is I'm going to...I don't want to hold you up. I know you're...

Elizabeth Limor: No. No. I have time. I didn't see...

Interviewer: I want to be able to get your portrait. I don't want to run out of time to get your portrait taken. What I'd like to do if this is okay with you, I'm going to work on your book when I get back so that I could fill in so I don't have to hold you up. I have a million questions.

Elizabeth Limor: The book took me one and half year.

Interviewer: Right. And I started it. I want to be able to go back with a lot of the questions I have.

Elizabeth Limor: Yeah, you will see...

Interviewer: And is it okay with you if I call you if I have any other questions?

Elizabeth Limor: Yes.

Interviewer: And then what I'd like to do is when I go to write the story, I'm going to contact you and go over it really quickly so that you feel like I've included what you want me to include.

Elizabeth Limor: Yes. My lifetime is not very long so you better do it.

Interviewer: It will be in the next couple of months. I just have so many questions. I'll keep you here all day.

Elizabeth Limor: I know and that's what I started to do now, question.

Interviewer: Right.