

Transcript:

Lea Naft

J13

54m23s

Interviewer: We are here today to tape Lea Naft's story from the Holocaust. Interviewer is Mary Arnold. Lea, you want to tell us something about your life before the war. Where did you live?

Lea Naft: We lived in Czechoslovakia; it's a small town.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: It was divided really, like a big town to three parts. And so, I remembered one thing, that we were raised not in a big town. It was a small place. We didn't finish the schooling because we couldn't, and we were about six kids in the family.

Interviewer: Yeah. All girls?

Lea Naft: Two boys and four girls. And the only thing that I could remember is, in 1939, up until then, we didn't experience nothing in particular that would have been against us or something. But then, in '39, the Czechs had to pull out because the Hungarian people took it over, which was run by the Germans. Then, the trouble started in '39. Everybody, the Jewish people was uncomfortable. It's not the Germans. There used to be...it's called Ukranian.

Interviewer: Ukrainians.

Lea Naft: Yeah, and then, they started. They probably already knew what was going on in the world. You see, we didn't. And they start to be, in school where we went, they start to call us names and things like that. We didn't pay attention to it and there was not too many Jewish people living there in the first place. So, we have just to keep to ourselves. And after that—

Interviewer: When did things change?

Lea Naft: In 1939.

Interviewer: And how?

Lea Naft: So, as I said, that we notice that the people, the neighbors, living around us, they were to us. They always have to call names until small kids started to call names and told us...I remember one little boy coming in to us, going to us like in a circle and he started like in a...it's not Russian language. It's Ukrainian language. They used to say, "[unintelligible 0:03:17.8]." That means, "Jew! Jew! The devil is after you." And where you have to go is—they would send you to Egypt. And this started out the trouble in that time. And my father was a really religious man. He had a big beard. He couldn't start to go out no more. And that continued until '41. Then, the program really started in that time. Then they ordered us that we have to get together and get for five days like clothes and food.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: They took us to a small town and it was a big room which I don't know, in that small town which had like 50 Jewish people lived in one and then about 100 in the other one, and there were three towns combined together. So, they bring us all together. But we didn't know what was going on. We knew we were under arrest and that was a ghetto. But I remember my mother and father was...We didn't know what was going

to happen, but my mother was not too well. So, we had a neighbor who was living farther up. He was a Christian.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: He was not a Jew. So he promised us he's going to keep them there. So, we and the girls and the rest of the family went. Now, my grandmother was 95 years old, they let her stay at that time in the house. But my mother, my father was in hiding at that time. They keep us in that place for five or six days, something like that, and they told us, see, they pick some people, and we didn't know what was going on. And they told us, they let us go. But, they escort us like they're the police to the house. And they told us we cannot leave from the house under no reason. We cannot move from the house freely.

Interviewer: You mean like house arrest?

Lea Naft: House arrest. Yes ma'am. And they put a big star, Jewish star on the house. And that's what they did, but the people that they took we didn't know. We saw the people going. We saw the people carrying the...They were going on a horse and buggy they put them on. But in that time, they took my sister, but she wasn't living in the same place where we were. She was married. She had four kids. They took her in 1941 with the four boys. And they took her to, it's called the [unintelligible 0:06:54.9]. They took her and then they took another sister too because they weren't living in the same place. So, we didn't know where they took them. We didn't know what was...we still was numb. Still we didn't have nothing to read. We didn't have no papers, nothing. We didn't know what was going on. But we were on that house arrest, we suffered from '41 until '43. And what happened at that time, we couldn't go out. We couldn't buy nothing, whatever we plant in the back of our house was a little like a backyard. We used to plant vegetables and everything and prepare for the winter. You see, if you watch yourself not to go out, nobody was coming into the house to do something to you. But I remember one thing in the same time was not far from us, a couple houses farther up, it was a rabbi. And that rabbi used to make...how the Jewish law is, you have to go through a shochet to get the meat. So, they told him once that you cannot use it

as a special knife that he used to use for that. And they find out that he was providing the meat for us. I mean not just for us, for the rest of the—

Interviewer: Making meat kosher.

Lea Naft: Yeah, meat kosher. So, one morning, that was on a Thursday morning, I never forget it. They heard a knock in the window and we had kids. And they had five kids. So, one of the girls come to the window, started to cry and called my mother's name. She said, "Golda, Golda, let us in." So, my mother opened the door and they started crying. She said, "They killed my daddy. They killed my daddy." And we asked her, "What?" You see, we didn't know what was going on. So she told us who come in, the police come in and they hurt him. So, you couldn't go right then, but we waited for a while and we saw nobody around there so we then went down there. And he was laying in a pool of blood. The blood was scattered all over the house. I remember Mama was sick. She couldn't get a doctor...she couldn't go get a doctor. So that was going up to '43. They come to the house and they give us a paper and they told us that we have to get ready like tomorrow morning, get yourselves together for five days, food, and nothing else to take. Everything has to be left behind. And then, they took us to a place that they called a ghetto. That was in [unintelligible 0:10:21.0]. I don't know what's the name in English. So we come over there, but before we went down there, they took together, you see, they didn't have no cars, no trucks. So some people could have gone on the horse and buggy. And you know what, but most of them were walking. It was crowded. They couldn't walk. It was a long way to go. But if you didn't want to get killed, you had to make it. You had to make it. So, it took us about three days to get to that place and we still didn't know what was going on. We were kept in the dark. And there was no television. There was no radio. Everything was taken.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: So you couldn't listen. You couldn't say, it's just we were living like in a cave, really. You couldn't know what was going on. So, they bring us over there and they keep us in that place for six or seven weeks and

there were people, one of them, because the whole section from where we were living, everybody was taken together and bring them over there. Then, they'll leave us there. We already knew where they are taking us, but we never knew that they're going to kill. You see, that was...Like my mother said, "Oh, you all will be going to work." We used to work. We go and make a living. But we didn't know what was waiting on us. But in that time, we noticed my grandmother, she was 95 years old so we were happy that they didn't touch her, but about two days later, they bring her, too. They didn't leave nothing behind. And after those six weeks, little by little, they started taking out all of us together to take us to the big city and from there, they took some trains. That was the train where they loaded up people, about 70, 75, all in one train. I mean, not the bus, the cattle trains.

Interviewer: Yeah. Cattle cars.

Lea Naft: Yeah, cattle cars, whatever they call them. So from there, they told us we'll be going on the train, but they never told us where they're taking us. You see, we didn't know that Auschwitz existed, or something like that. So they took and they put us all together in that train, although I don't know how many people went at the same time when we went. But I know it was a long, long train; it was filled up with people. So I guess whatever Jew was left over there from '41, they took them all together. So, the train was going...I don't know, day and night, I don't know how many nights. I can't remember exactly. So, from there, they took us to Auschwitz. I remember on the border where the Germans took us over, from the Hungarian police. So then, we knew that something is wrong as we go on to the end and we didn't know still. I remember my mother used to say, "No crying. You are going to be all right. You go get there and we're going to have work."

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: And do things. We didn't know what was going on. But in the meantime...let me go back for a minute. Yeah, I was talking about my sisters. One sister, I remember we still was home, when they took her away. She didn't have no children. Her husband was one of the partisans, you know, underground, and they didn't have no chance to

take him. So, what she did, beg somehow. I don't know. She had money probably and paid somebody that they're going to cross from the border from Poland through the mountains. And somehow, she made it home, and she was kept locked from '41 to '43 and we knew that she was living, but we never could go see her because we weren't...we couldn't get out. But the other sister met her husband and the kids; they never come back. And then, the same thing happened to my brother. He was not military; he was like [unintelligible 0:15:25.6]. I don't what they call it. It's—

Interviewer: The National Guard here?

Lea Naft: Yes, something like that. But then, they took him; the Germans took him from there and they did. They went to his house and took his wife with the three kids, three boys. So, they took them to Auschwitz and that was all, the end of that, too. As far as my sister, we didn't know nothing about the kids. We didn't know nothing about her until after we were liberated. But going back to Auschwitz, when we got there, the train stopped. They kept us, I don't know, it was a night or two nights. They kept us locked up. It was awful in that train because, excuse me for —they had to do everything inside, can't go out, people got sick. It was awful. Kids were crying and it was just terrible. It was terrible we thought we'd never make it. We thought we never would make it, but we made it to the end somehow. So, after the three nights, they kept us locked up I guess, it was filled up or something, they couldn't let us down. So coming down from the train, I saw people in striped uniforms. And it was...some people were, on one side, and some...there were men. So they started to take down the people from the train and then I thought that that's it. God, I'd never forget.

Interviewer: Were you being sorted out then?

Lea Naft: They took...we were down there. They took the older people, you see, on one side, and the younger on the other side. So, I remember, my mother...I was running after my mother. So, one of the people that was there, he took [unintelligible]. He gave me a big slap on my face and then he said to me, "You better run over there." And I didn't know what he meant by that. But I guess he saved my life because if I would have

run after her, I could never have made it. So, they divided us right there. They took us on one side. The train left so we saw they took all...most of the older people separate. They put them in a wired place. It was wired up. They all was still there. It was awful and they took us to the place, we didn't know where we were going, but they took us in steam bath, they called it. I don't know what it was. It was probably the crematorium on the other side. So, we started to get in there. We didn't have nothing on us. They took everything. We come in there. So, they started, first of all, they shaved us. They took all the clothes off, shaved us, from top to bottom. And they put us in the [unintelligible 0:19:12.4]. It was made like steps—

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: That place was packed with vermin. I never saw something.

Interviewer: Was that a barrack?

Lea Naft: No. That was where they took us apart.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: You know, they put two lines after you got through in it?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: And there was...one was going one side, the other was going that side, who was lucky went to the right. The unlucky ones to the left. But we didn't know what they're going to do with that. We thought they just clean us, but...Some people couldn't take it. It was so hot. It was steamy that they just fainted and fell down. And the other ones, they started to take them out so they made two places. And there were

doctors over there, the Germans. And they picked. They showed me the finger, you go there or you go there. And we didn't know. My sister was with me. We tried to stay together the whole time.

Interviewer: Let's pause for a minute. You're doing good. You're doing fine. You're ready to go back, okay.

Lea Naft: Okay. Then, they took us...it was the day, they started to pick us.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: I guess that they took the healthier ones and the ones they probably just pushed them straight to the crematorium because it was right there where the steam bath was.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: It was on the left side. I remember the doors and I remember everything. So after that, they gave us...after we got through, after they picked most of the people, so they gave us striped clothes to put on. Then, we started to go back, then they started to take us to the barracks, but while we were going to the barracks, I still saw my parents. That place where they didn't recognize us. We were shaved there, you know, with those—they just couldn't recognize us. We waved to them, they didn't know who was waving to them. But that night, they put us in a barrack. And they had like bunk beds. There were about 11 kids, 11 girls, in one bunk. So, I remember like today, I remember the same night, how they pushed my father back. I could swear that the same night that they killed him because I felt that [unintelligible 0:22:13.0]. But it was terrible in there. They usually got up early in the morning about 6 o'clock. It was still used to be dark and we had to line up. They had to call up. We had the numbers sewn on the—

Interviewer: Yeah. Did you get a tattoo?

Lea Naft: No. You see, we were the last ones that there was...we had them on the dresses.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: They put on the number. But I remember, some kids used to...some of us, 12, some were 14. They usually got sick. They took them away; they never come back. I remember one night, one of the girls got so sick of toothache, just a plain toothache. So somebody came and we didn't know. You see, we didn't know what was going to happen to her and we called somebody to help her.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: They took her out; they never bring her back. So that was going on for seven weeks; we were still there. After the seven weeks—

Interviewer: Did you have to do any work?

Lea Naft: Not in Auschwitz, no, not in Auschwitz. We just...we stayed in the room and they took us, and the only time we were outside is when we have to go in the morning for the—

Interviewer: Yeah, the count...You have to leave for the count.

Lea Naft: That's right, for the count. But after the seven weeks, they took us to Stutthof. There was another camp. And when we got to Stutthof, they put us on trucks. While we were going on the trucks, we saw soldiers but they were in black uniform. We were driving through mountains,

and we didn't know where we're going at that time either so that was another camp where they took us.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: It was a new camp because you could see the sand. You could stand on the sand and feel that you are sinking in the sand. Then we stayed over there for three weeks, too, the same thing, just like, cattle put together. And some again got sick and some couldn't take it, some of them...They took them back and that was the end of it. And from there, after the three weeks, again, they had the soldiers. So they picked again, two different categories, and we didn't know what was going on either, what they're going to do because they never told us that we were going to work. So, when they picked us, one of the soldiers said to me and to my sister. He said, "You know where you are going, it's going to be very hot. Do you think you'd be able to make it like this?"And we said yes, but we was holding on so stiff in the hands that they wouldn't tear us apart, but they didn't. From there, they picked about 800 women at that time; I don't know how many of us left, but plenty of us.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: And they took us to a place called [Prost (sp) 0:25:43.3]. That was about 10 kilometers from [Danzig (sp) 0:25:47.0]. And over there, the work started. What we started off to do is plane from the top to the bottom to start—

Interviewer: Landing field.

Lea Naft: Landing field, yeah. And we used to dig, they have those little, what you put the—

Interviewer: Wheelbarrow?

Lea Naft: Yeah, no, it was not wheelbarrow. It was like a little train going—

Interviewer: Oh, yeah. I can't think of the word either.

Lea Naft: We used to be back...let's see...three people to one of those. And at certain times, you have to fill it up. You have to shovel it. And from there after we shoveled, we had to come back and fix the cement. So, we were doing a really bad hard labor. And I remember my hand was blistered up. I used to take paper from the...cement paper and cover it up so we could continue because we knew if somebody gets sick and goes out of there, they never come back. That's it. So, we did that and then we did...they put in the cable under...cable and we had to dig those trenches for the cable. That was awful. We had to dig, I don't know...I remember we used to go into it, hardly you could see us out and it was winter. In the winter, you couldn't dig because it was frozen.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: So, we used to tell each other if we're not going to do nothing, we get frozen. So, we used to take that, I don't know what you call it, what you dig with it. It was not a shovel. It was...

Interviewer: Like a sledgehammer?

Lea Naft: No, it was...it was like a—

Interviewer: A pick? A pick.

Lea Naft: Yeah, a pick. I remember we used to dig it with a pick and the dirt used to knock back the pick because it was so frozen that...but we had to do it, if not, we'd had been frozen. I remember we had on some

kind of coat and no warmer than the wooden shoes we used to go so what we used to do, we used to take the cement box and cut out the papers and put it on us so the wind wouldn't go through us, but when we went back to the camp, we couldn't wear it. So we had to take it right there and then off. And after we got through with that, then they took us to the railroad to work. I remember we used to carry the railroad...the—

Interviewer: The ties?

Lea Naft: No, not the ties. The railroad tracks on our shoulders. You could take the hand and put it in the shoulder. That's how deep the cut used to be. And they tried to do the hardest thing that most of the people couldn't make it. They took them away. They never come back. Who was stronger who tried to see to it that you make it, you did it. And after that, they used to take us in the morning. It was the one with the 50 girls, the group. And everybody has somebody to take care of them so that we used to go in the morning and come back in the afternoon. And as far as the food we used to have it in the morning before we were...It used to be just like water. We used to see little pieces like meat, floating around, but you see, that meat was pork, and we knew that pork, we couldn't eat. So what we do, what did we think, we had to have it, we pushed away the pork, but we used with the soup, it was the same thing. Then, they used to put us in line to go for it. If somebody stepped out...I remember one of the girls stepped out of the line so they took her and put her in the middle, and make a circle out of us and there was the hope lady, the couple, what they called it, I don't know, so what she took a switch, a rubber switch, and she gave her 25 lashes. And after that, she fall down, she [unintelligible 0:30:50.5]. And they continued, so we knew already we cannot step out of the line. So over there, in that time, we were working, we did whatever we could to see to it that we don't get hurt, won't do something to us that...what...because of what they did with us, when we come to Auschwitz, I go back there, they put something in the food that we wouldn't menstruate. And some people got really sick, terrible. Two girls got so sick that they lost their mind and they took them away. What happened to me one morning, I got up, it was bunk beds. I got up, and one was going down, I have even now see here that...(points to leg)

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: I had that growth there and it opened, and the blood just started to stream out like water. So we didn't know what we do. We tried to help each other, the girls over there. So one of the girls said, "Look, if you're going to go to the doctor, you'll never come back." So, somehow, we had something. Somebody had something to put on it and put like a little, so nobody can see it what was going on, the dress was long enough to cover it up. But then, we come to work. So, one of the men, we didn't see no men around there, but the person that was hauling away that cement, he saw me, that I had problem with the feet, so when we went to pick up the shovels, I find, bandages... he was a Pollack, bandages under that shovel and I found a long sock onto the shovel. So, the girls were hiding me so nobody can see me. So I went to a bush and put that bandage on the foot, put on that sock, but I couldn't go back into the camp. So we took it back out and I left it for the next day and this would help me otherwise I had probably would have lost my leg, or my life, too. But we were going on with that work, whoever could make it, made it. If not, they took him out and that's it. But from there, where the trouble started is by the end of it, the war was closing in. And one morning, they came in and they told us to get up; it was about 4 o'clock in the morning and they said, you know, we didn't have nothing with us.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: So we started to walk from that camp. They emptied that camp completely.

Interviewer: When was that? Do you know?

Lea Naft: That was in...I know it was '44. They were driving us about three weeks. It was still winter. There was snow. There was snow. So it must have been in January or February, one of those.

Interviewer: '44—

Lea Naft: Yeah, '44, January or February. So, we didn't know where we're going at that time, but what happened, they knew we could hear, that they're fighting some place, but we couldn't see nothing.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: So, from there, we started to go and we saw other camps, too, but our group was, I remember, that the man, the man that was running that camp, he was a fat guy and they were pushing us. They said, "We have to go, we have to go, we have to go." And it was going on like three weeks. So, what happened they took us to a barn, big huge barn. Can you imagine? They put us together, 800 women, in that barn. But there was no name. It was just a free land. There was no city. There was no town. There was nothing over there. And they kept us over there after those three weeks, four weeks in that barn. What happened, we start to get sick. They kept us locked up in there. We start to get sick. We start to get lice. God, I'll never forget it. The people got so with lice all over that they couldn't...they didn't know what to do. And people got really sick, they couldn't move, but they had water on the side of the house, so one of the soldiers got there and they say, "If you want to get out to get cleaned up, there's water in the back," but it was frozen. It was not true that you could put it, so what we did, we just scrubbed the lice and took our dress and dipped it in the frozen water. And that, that helped a lot of people.

Interviewer: Yeah, because the—

Lea Naft: But after that, one morning, they came in and it was about 3 o'clock in the morning after four weeks we were staying there. They said, "Rausch, rausch, rausch." To get up. So people lined up there. We were walking. We didn't see all the people that were in there. And after that, we were going about five days. So we came to a place, that was close to where the last stop was, and I remember one of the soldiers came and say to some of the girls, said, "I know you are all hungry. You all want to eat. I have some work for you." So about 15 of

us volunteered. So, me and my sister and other ones, they took us all, but we didn't know what kind of work it was. They took us on the horse and buggy and they turned us back where we came from. We were going driving and we saw on the streets people, laying, killed. And we had to pick up those people and put them on the horse and buggy, and take them—and we were going back where we come from, from the, what you call it....

Interviewer: On the airfield?

Lea Naft: No, no, no. That was already where we went out of there. The barn.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Lea Naft: Oh, when we come to the barn, we saw people over there...God, that picture will never erase from my mind. We saw people over there. There were dead and there were still breathing. So the soldiers went in, they finished them up. So, they made us to dig, going in farther up and dig between the trees, graves, massive graves. We put together, I don't know, about three or four hundred people in those graves. So, after, we put about 50 in each grave, we covered them up, and then, they took us back where the food was. They let us get some horse meat, and we took the horse meat and we were eating it, but we got really sick from it. I got so sick that I was sitting on the snow, blood was running from my [unintelligible 0:39:23.0]. [Unintelligible 0:39:33.1] the name of [unintelligible0:39:34.2] where they took us by the Baltic Sea.

Interviewer: [Unintelligible 0:39:47.7]

Lea Naft: [Unintelligible 0:39:48.6], yeah. On the map, it's different, but that—

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: On the English map, it...After we got through burying those people, we went back to the place where we were supposed to go further. And from there, they started to march us again and some people still couldn't make it, but we tried. We didn't—we were sitting down on the snow for a while without getting up. And to me, we were almost there. So, we come to one place that they wouldn't let us through because people had lice, so they brought a big dish of water and it was still freezing. So they made us to take off all of our clothes and dip it in the water because they had some kind of disinfectant. I remember, I even have a sign. I took that dress out and stick to my hand, that's how frozen it is.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: And we put that off and right on our body, had to dry up. So, they took us and they were marching us up to the Baltic Sea, but I am sure that was what they was figuring —was to throw us into the water. When we got there, it was a camp, barracks, where the German soldiers were, because when we got there, it still was warm, but there were no soldiers around. There was nothing around there. But that [unintelligible 0:41:41.0], the guy that was around at camp, he still didn't want to give up and let us go. Most of those Germans, some of them ran away. They didn't stay.

Interviewer: Was this in '45?

Lea Naft: In '45. Yeah, that was already in '45. So, it was in '45 in March.

Interviewer: Yeah. You got liberated or—?

Lea Naft: No. We got liberated after that. You see, that was in March and we got to that barracks.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: And we were staying there for a week or two, but we could hear the fight. You couldn't see the fire, but you could hear it.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: So, I remember, there was a lady over there, she had three daughters with her. She was, I don't know, she was maybe about 55 years, but the reason she was with us because she was very healthy and she didn't look like she was 55 years old. So, I remember some people, we were hiding outside. She said we cannot sit in the barracks because they will throw bombs or something on the barracks, but there was, over there, they kept picks. The house was where they kept picks. So she said to us instead stand in the barracks, let's go a couple of us in each of those, because from the 800, we probably over there about less 250.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: That's about it what was left. The other ones were killed. So, after that, the next morning, we were sitting. It was straw. The ground was very cold so it was straw. That was already in **Putsch (sp)**. It was right at the Baltic Sea.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: So, we were sitting and some of the people brought food to the gate. So, the woman that was a friend of ours she got up and she said, "No, we don't want your food." But she turned around to us and said to us, "I'll never forget, she said, "I'll tell you what we all are going to do. We are going to make Tisha B'Av today." Because she knew that probably we're going to be thrown into the sea. So Tisha B'Av it means it's a—

Interviewer: A fast day.

Lea Naft: A fast day. So, we were fasting. We didn't fast enough, so we were fasting completely that day. So, the next morning, she said to me, she called me in my name, she says, "Lea, you all try to take a sleep. God is with us and we're going to make it. We made it so far. We're going to make it."

Interviewer: And you did.

Lea Naft: But the next day, we heard some girls hollering, you know, hollering. I remember three of them got crazy. They just couldn't take it. When the Russians came in, with all the stuff. So we were liberated, which we were lucky. If it would have been maybe a day or two more, we would have been all dead. And after that, people just were liberated, they got sick. I was very weak. I couldn't walk. We went into the house and we were staying in the house for two weeks. At that time, I could die, too, but my sister helped me through that. And I had another girl, a friend of mine; she was a cousin, too. And I gave her my food to help me out to continue to walk because once you sit down, you got the bullet in you. But after we were liberated, some of those...everybody was hungry, whatever they saw they wanted to eat. And they ate all kinds of stuff that they weren't supposed to, and they got very sick, they got typhus, the hospitals were filled up, and from there, we ran away because we thought if they went in there...we'll never make it out.

Interviewer: Did you go back to your hometown?

Lea Naft: Halfway. You see, I knew we lost everything; we didn't want to see even the place.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: We went halfway, we turned around, and me and my sister, and we heard my brother was living and we knew that he is in Prague some place or in Pilsen some place, so we tried to go and look for him after we were liberated. But in the meantime, we went to Romania. And we went to the train and somebody told us if you'll go, you'll be not able to get out because the Russians took it over. So we didn't go, but we knew he was living. And then somebody we knew that was there when my sister, the one with the four boys, she told us she saw that they...she was in a little hay, where they kept hay for the cows, so they turned that on fire, they killed her and the kids and they all died at the fire.

Interviewer: And where did you meet your husband?

Lea Naft: In Romania.

Interviewer: In Romania.

Lea Naft: Yeah. The reason why...how we met, we went over there. It was a Jewish, like a Jewish community center. We went there for help. We didn't have nothing. So they gave us clothes to put on and everything and they told us, if we go back, we'll be not able to go, but in Romania, they had kibbutz that some of the people that went through the Holocaust, they travel, that they're getting ready to immigrate to Israel. So, he was over there. He was running that place. So, we were three girls, me and my sister and then a friend of ours, and we decided we will go there. There was no other place to go. There was no home. There was nothing. We came over there, we stayed there for three...no, I don't know how long...It was about a year, '44, three months, yeah, three months. So they came and then they told us...they made us false papers. So, we had to walk again, suffer, and walk through the mountains. Didn't have nothing on us, nothing but false papers, and they told us we have to go to Italy, and from Italy, from there, once we're going to be in Italy, it's going to be all right.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: So, we went from Romania, we went to Yugoslavia. In Yugoslavia, we got married. We just thought, we might as well get married and that's it. And from Yugoslavia, where we got married, but we had...my husband didn't have a suit. So somebody borrowed the suit of my brother-in-law and after him, he borrowed that suit. And somebody borrowed the rings for us to get married. And when we got back, we had a piece of cheese and sitting on a concrete floor, but at least we were alive, we were happy, whatever we had we was satisfied, that's it. We were hoping for better. So, from there, we come to Italy. Now, in Italy, we were in a Displaced Persons Camp. We were staying over there for four years. So, we were still thinking to go to Israel, but then, I remember that I had an uncle in Ohio. So, went into this Jewish center, over there to the people and they found him out and we wrote him a letter. So they said to us that they're going to try to get us out. So, they sent the papers and that's how we come to New York. But it wasn't a picnic coming here, either, but we were lucky that we went in here. And let me tell you something, it's a good land to be in and we worked hard. If you want to make something out of you, you just try. If you have the opportunity to do it, you make it. If you have a will in yourself. We didn't have to turn to welfare and we didn't have to turn to nobody, and as far as my uncle is concerned, he didn't help us with nothing. When we got here to Nashville, we had two people that co-signed for my husband, \$170 to be able to bring the little furniture that we had in Ohio.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lea Naft: Because in Ohio, he lost his job because it was in that time, coal strike. So, they let him go. So he was lucky he had a job over here, I kept boarders. I tried to help my husband. We tried to help each other. We brought four kids into this world and we tried to—

Interviewer: And they all turned out fine.

Lea Naft: Fine. Very good school and everything.

Interviewer: They all turned out fine.

Lea Naft: So we're just some of the lucky ones. That's it. But it's still—

Interviewer: Are we lucky, or are we just fighters?

Lea Naft: So, first, I think it has to do one with the other. You couldn't fight without having luck.

Interviewer: True.

Lea Naft: You couldn't fight. It's just about...we had somebody up there to look out for us.

Interviewer: I think that's it.

Lea Naft: Yeah. I think he was the only one that it's like a lot people say, "Oh, I don't believe in the religion." They said, "Where was God." I said, "He was there." They tried to destroy the old Jewish ways, they couldn't, and I don't think nobody ever will be able to do that.

Interviewer: Nope. You fight on. I know this wasn't easy for you to talk about it.

Lea Naft: So, I tell you, I took—

Interviewer: But doesn't it feel good now to, at least, you're leaving this for your children—

Lea Naft: Yeah.

Interviewer: —and your grandchildren.

Lea Naft: As far as talking, some of my kids know, but I didn't go full all the details. And some of them couldn't take. Some of my, for instance, you take two of my boys, I don't think they could listen to it.

Interviewer: They may not be able to now, they may be at a later time.

Lea Naft: I hope later on, maybe, they...later on in life, maybe, they will, but—

Interviewer: Well, we certainly appreciate your story so...

Lea Naft: I was glad to say it, so it will go on and people know what was going on and because look, we're getting older.

Interviewer: It's like—

Lea Naft: It's hard...10 more years, 20, 50 more years, people will live to be able to tell it.

Interviewer: Yeah. And it's like a jigsaw puzzle.

Lea Naft: Yeah.

Interviewer: Little pieces fit together to make the big picture.

Lea Naft: Yeah.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for talking.

Lea Naft: I was glad to do it. It feels better off my chest.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. That's right.

Lea Naft: I'm probably going to dream about it tonight.

Interviewer: Maybe not.

Lea Naft: Oh, I dream a lot.

Interviewer: Yeah. I do, too, but maybe you won't.

Lea Naft: Oh, mama, it's never. Never goes away.

Interviewer: It's not forgotten. It will never be forgotten.

Lea Naft: Never goes and no matter what you do, you turn around, you're still back there.

Interviewer: Yeah, but look what we have today. How grateful we can be.

Lea Naft: I am. I've been—

Interviewer: Yeah, I know.

Lea Naft: I've been through plenty here, too, and I'm still grateful.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Lea Naft: Look, I'm still alive and kicking.

Interviewer: That's it. Exactly.

Lea Naft: Still alive and kicking. I appreciate your help.

Interviewer: Okay.

Lea Naft: I know you're tired. You almost fall asleep.

Interviewer: I am tired.