

Leona Kleiner
Oral History Transcript

Leona Kleiner: And we started to walk through the fields, and we walked, and we walked. And from far away, we saw two boys are coming close us, prisoners too. And the three sisters, we were walking, three in a row, and we were walking.

They came to us and they said to us, "Would you mind if we walk together?" So we said, "No, not at all," because they were prisoners, too. And we were walking, the five of us in the row, and all of a sudden the two of them walked on a mine.

So we walked through the fields, and we got into that little town. The town was Schwerin, [Germany]. And when we got into Schwerin, you know, we saw soldiers with the white helmets, with the white gloves, and with the white armbands. We didn't know what they were. That was the [US Army] MP [Military Police]. And they greeted us. And they said to us, "Welcome. We're happy that you are here."

And they said, now go, go into a house. You can pick any house you want. And if the house wasn't empty, we'll take care of it. But—people went into houses, but the three of us, you know, we were afraid to go into a house. So we saw in the field a bombed out truck. So we went on that truck and we lived on that truck for six weeks.

Every morning, American soldiers came over and they brought us bread, coffee, chocolate, cigarettes. And in fact, I was the youngest one, I was the baby—of course, I wasn't a baby at that time anymore, but they called me the baby. And one soldier got me a bicycle, and then one soldier said to me, if I would like to come to the [United] States, that he'll adopt me, and he'll take—which they did, you know.

And I said no, I wouldn't do it, because I don't want to be separated from my sisters. I wanted to be together with my sisters. So we lived in that truck for six weeks. After six weeks, the MP came and said, "I'm sorry, you cannot stay here no longer. You have to go into the DP [displaced person] camp." We didn't know what the DP camp was.

So they took us in, and they gave us apartments. It was a beautiful building, a red brick building. It was a beautiful building. So we got an apartment where we were, three of us. And then that gentleman—when we went to the forest, he came over to us and he said, "You shouldn't stay there," that we should leave that forest—so he found us, and he lived with us.

And sure enough, the same gentleman, the same guy, married my sister, my oldest sister, and he became my brother-in-law. So the four of us lived together. We had the kitchen, we had the bedroom, and we stayed there. And in that DP camp, one day I went into Schwerin, into the town, because that camp was out of town.

So I walked, my sister, my older sister said to me, "Would you like..."—you know, we had boots. In Germany in those years, everybody had boots. So my sister said to me, "Would you like to go

into the shoemaker, to town, to bring in my shoes to have it fixed?" I wouldn't say no. I said, "Of course I'll go." And I walked.

I went to the shoemaker and left the boots, and then he said to me, "You have to pick it up the next day." So I had to walk back to the DP camp and I was already tired, so I figured, I'm going to take the bus. When I went on the bus, a gentleman got up and he told me to sit down on his seat.

And I sat down and he started to talk to me. And then he said to me, and we got up from the bus, he said, "Would you mind if I walk you to your house?" I said, "Not at all." And he walked me. Sure enough, I found out that he was in the DP camp too, and he was in the same building that I was. He was on the first floor, and we were on the second floor.

And that's how I met my husband. And then I was dating my husband for one year, and we got married. When we got married, we didn't want to stay in Germany. We wanted to come to the States, but I remember I had three uncles in the States, but we didn't know where they were.

But my husband had a mother. She survived. She was 47 years old, and she survived. She survived, and her daughter and my husband. So she had cousins in the States, and she remembered where. So she wrote them a letter, and sure enough, we had an answer from them. And they said we should wait and they're going to try to take us to the States, they're going to send papers for us.

So we were waiting in Germany four years till the papers came. It wasn't easy in those years to come to America like now, now the borders are open. In those years, it was very, very hard to get in. So we waited four years and we came to the States.

When we came to the states, we didn't know where to go. But my mother-in-law, she had cousins here in America. So they took a little care of us. But we were seven people.

So finally we came here with their ship from Bremerhaven, from Germany. We came here by boat and the boat, an old army boat, the name of the boat was *General Sturgis*. And we were supposed to come to New York. But we didn't come to New York, we came to Boston. And a lot of the people went to Ellis Island, but we didn't go to Ellis Island.

So when we got here, you know, we didn't know where to go, what to do, what to tell, what to—no relatives, no nothing. So finally we took a little apartment. It was a two bedroom apartment, I remember like now—it was a walk-in in Brooklyn. Because we came to Boston, and from Boston, and we came to Brooklyn.

So we took the apartment. And it was my mother-in-law, my husband, and I. It was an uncle and his wife. And then it was a little boy. And then another couple. We had only two rooms. And then we had to make a living. We didn't know how to, you know, but people were very kind.

The Americans were very kind. They heard that refugees came. They came to the door, and they knocked on the door and they kept asking us if we need some help, if they can help us. But we said no, thank you. We appreciate very much, but thank you. We're going to try to do it on our own, you know.