

UKHMF TESTIMONY TRANSCRIPT – SARA KRAUS

[Testimony: 55 mins 23” No Artefacts]

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10:00:00:00

Sara Kraus

my name is Sara Kraus. I was born in Bratislava in 1933 and I survived Bergen-Belsen.

[Fade to black and back up]

10:00:08:08

Interviewer

How much of your experiences did you share with your family and your children as they were growing up?

10:00:15:07

Sara Kraus

Very-, my family were with, with me in the war. My parents are not all the time, but they know about it. And my children are not very interested.

10:00:26:11

Interviewer

Your children are not interested?

10:00:27:22

Sara Kraus

Not really.

10:00:29:24

Interviewer

Have you ever tried to tell them what happened? And what is their reaction?

10:00:36:03

Sara Kraus

Nothing much. My son maybe, but they're not very interested.

10:00:40:21

Interviewer

Why do you think it's important that people understand what happened to you and your family?

10:00:49:08

Sara Kraus

I think it's, it's important they should appreciate. If they don't have all this trouble and all that life. They should know that -, a normal life, they should appreciate it. Never mind what happened to me. But they should appreciate they've got a nice -, a normal nice life. And they don't go through all this trouble, and all that that we went through. But you know how it is, they don't want know.

10:01:15:15

Interviewer

So, as they were growing up, did you try to explain to them what happened to you

when you were their age, and what happened to your family?

10:01:23:11

Sara Kraus

I talked to them, not when they're very young, but when they grew up, yes. As, as I say, not very interested.

10:01:30:13

Interviewer

Do you have grandchildren?

10:01:32:01

Sara Kraus

Yes. I have great-grandchildren.

10:01:34:16

Interviewer

How many grandchildren do you have?

10:01:36:07

Sara Kraus

Oh, I don't know. I can't tell you. A lot.

10:01:38:01

Interviewer

A lot. Have any of them asked you about your experiences?

10:01:41:18

Sara Kraus

No. No. They're children. No. They don't know it, they don't know.

10:01:47:07

Interviewer

Have you ever tried to explain to them what happened to you?

10:01:50:05

Sara Kraus

Not to the grandchildren.

10:01:54:05

Interviewer

Why do you think it, this project is important? Why did you agree to give your testimony to this project?

10:02:00:07

Sara Kraus [*Interrupting Interviewer*]

People should know what happened. People are interested. Some people are. It's important to know what happened and what was and be grateful that nothing like this happens to them.

10:02:15:06

Interviewer

Is it difficult for you to share your story?

10:02:20:16

Sara Kraus

Not really. It depends who, but not really.

10:02:25:05

Interviewer

How often do you think about what happened to you, now?

10:02:30:14

Sara Kraus

What, what happened to me then?

10:02:32:07

Interviewer

Yes, how often -, Now, how often do you think about your past?

10:02:37:09

Sara Kraus

Not very often. I mostly think more about my parents I lost and this. The past was the past and I know it was a horrible past, but that's it.

10:02:51:07

Interviewer

How much of the way you have lived your life was influenced, do you think, by what happened to you when you were a child?

10:03:05:11

Sara Kraus

[Pause] What you mean influenced?

10:03:07:21

Interviewer

I'm trying to work out ,um, the experiences that you had, how did it impact on the rest of your life?

10:03:18:14

Sara Kraus

Well, I say it at the end I live it, the horrible experiences, the horrible things, but sort of live with it. You have it, you live with it, and you hope no, nobody is, did it ever happen again and that the children will be protected.

10:03:37:21

Interviewer

The idea that it will never happen again is very important.

10:03:42:21

Sara Kraus

But how can you, how can you be sure? People are just what they are. Those were the Nazis and then the, the, now, nowadays other people.

10:03:56:19

Interviewer

Can you tell me a little bit about how you feel towards the Nazis?

10:04:03:22

Sara Kraus

Now, how should I feel? I have seen them in camp. I have seen them around. I found they are not human beings. The way they behaved they were not; they are not human beings. I know that some of their own people were afraid of them. I remember that in camp. So I'm certain older people in the -, from the Nazis. They hated it, but they couldn't come out with it because the others in camp, the other Nazis that were there, they favoured them.

10:04:44:17

Interviewer

Is forgiveness possible for you?

10:04:47:11

Sara Kraus

No. Not for the Germans, no. I would ask this question, no. A human being doesn't behave like that. Whatever. Nazi or, or, or Jewish or, or, or whatever. This behaviour is not human.

10:50:08:03

Interviewer

And what about modern day Germany, how do you feel towards Germany today?

10:05:12:24

Sara Kraus

If I can I don't go in there. I don't step on the soil. If I need to, see I fly from country to country, eh? You fly you go, so I try not to get any flights that stop in Germany even for five minutes. Once I have a, it happened that the flight stopped, and I had to wait in Germany. I hated every minute of it, and I wouldn't speak German to them at all. I speak perfect German. I wouldn't speak German to them, only English, and I hated it, every, every German I saw there, I was boiling.

10:05:53:10

Interviewer

So you speak perfect German now?

10:05:55:06

Sara Kraus

Yes.

10:05:55:24

Interviewer

- but you will never utter a word of German?

10:05:57:22

Sara Kraus

I can't say never because I have family, the family, people who speak German. My mother tongue is German. *[Pause]* We spoke German at home. But,

10:06:16:02

Interviewer

What about German products? How do you feel towards anything that's made in Germany?

10:06:21:15

Sara Kraus

You've got no choice very often. So it, it is a dilemma.

10:06:29:03

Interviewer

But if you can, you try to avoid everything -

10:06:31:11

Sara Kraus

Yes.

10:06:31:18

Interviewer

- to do with Germany.

10:06:34:02

Sara Kraus

Yes.

10:06:35:09

Interviewer

And do you think that the modern-day German, the new generations, are still responsible? Do you think that they have tried to make up for the sins of -

10:06:46:20

Sara Kraus *[talking over Interviewer]*

They can't make up.

10:06:48:10

Interviewer

They can't?

10:06:49:06

Sara Kraus

It is ingrained in them. [Pause] Of course they try, but it's ingrained. I don't know where I travelled um- er, in Germany. I, I, I, travelled somewhere through Germany, in the train, I went from -, which country? - one country to another. People spoke German. I wouldn't speak the German to them. Although, as I say, at home I spoke German. Because that's what you talk in Czechoslovakia. The Jews spoke German among themselves.

10:07:28:16

Interviewer

Do you think we have learned anything from that period in history?

10:07:34:04

Sara Kraus

From history? I don't think so.

10:07:40:13

Interviewer

Why?

10:07:42:08

Sara Kraus

If it'd happen again, the same thing would happen. Because that's people.

10:07:49:08

Interviewer

Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

10:07:55:17

Sara Kraus

Difficult to say, but I find the Germans are the Germans. It's in them.

10:08:05:21

Interviewer

So when you say it might happen again, do you mean in Germany?

10:08:10:12

Sara Kraus

I hope it won't happen again.

10:08:12:12

Interviewer

Yes. But do you fear it is still within the German psyche that it could happen again?

10:08:18:21

Sara Kraus

I think the Germans are just -, that's their nature.

10:08:26:17

Interviewer

So if you were to meet a German person in this country, how do you respond?

10:08:32:03

Sara Kraus

I, I don't start quarrelling with anybody, and I talk to them, but I, I don't really like it.

10:08:42:09

Interviewer

Are you still afraid of Germans?

10:08:44:00

Sara Kraus

No. I'm not afraid one bit. I'm not afraid since the war. I say this hundreds of times. I'm not afraid of a human being. Only from God, not human beings.

10:08:59:15

Interviewer

Why do you think it's important to record your testimony today? Why do you think this project is going ahead?

10:09:09:09

Sara Kraus

The people should know what happened. People should know. The children, the later generation should know and, and learn not to do it.

10:09:20:10

Interviewer

Was it difficult for you to come today to give your testimony?

10:09:23:19

Sara Kraus

No.

10:09:24:00

Interviewer

Were you worried about it?

10:09:24:23

Sara Kraus

No. Not at all. Many years have passed. I was asked very often about this so, no.

10:09:37:06

Interviewer

And if you have learned anything from the experience that you went through, is there a lesson that you can share with us about life that we can learn?

10:09:47:16

Sara Kraus

Yes, be good to everybody. Don't be rotten to people. Don't be-, don't wish them bad. Be nice. You're here or not here, you don't have to have, you don't need to be friends with people, but be, be, be a person. Talk to people nice. Behave nice. You don't have to get to make friends with everybody but behave like a human being. I think that's very important.

10:10:22:04

Interviewer

I agree with you. How important has Judaism been in in your life?

10:10:28:22

Sara Kraus

Oh, all my life. Judaism is all my life. There's no life without it.

10:10:36:20

Interviewer

There must have been times in your experience where you questioned if there is a God?

10:10:42:03

Sara Kraus

I never questioned, never. There were times when I couldn't keep anything, yes, because I was in such circumstances, that the Germans or whatever. I was hiding or whatever. I couldn't keep anything, but when nobody saw, I did.

10:10:57:24

Interviewer

Do you mean there are times when you couldn't observe the traditions that you needed to, to observe?

10:11:04:16

Sara Kraus

But when nobody was there and I could, then I did.

10:11:09:22

Interviewer

So that has been your strength?

10:11:11:17

Sara Kraus

Yes, definite. My belief was, [?] my father. My belief was my strength, oh sin-, such a little child. And my father, he was a strong believer. He was a very, very straight man. So you believed him, because he was so truth and so -, you know, you, you just believed him.

10:11:37:19

Interviewer

Okay. Sara let's now, - those are the general questions I was telling you about. Let's now start, er, at the beginning of your life. Er, you were born in Bratislava, which is now in Slovakia, isn't it? You were born on the 11th of December 1933.

10:11:53:06

Sara Kraus

Mm-mm.

10:11:55:05

Interviewer

Tell me a little bit about your family?

10:11:57:11

Sara Kraus

Oh, a lovely family. A lovely-, I had lovely parents. Really very, very nice parents. Loving, warm, lovely parents. And the whole family were very -, a unit, all of us. It was a very nice family. I never heard of quarrels in the family. There were no such thing with us.

10:12:22:22

Interviewer

And your family had run a textile business for a very long time?

10:12:26:19

Sara Kraus

In textile, yes.

10:12:27:11

Interviewer

Textiles, yes. Um and your father worked with your, your mother's brother?

10:12:34:09

Sara Kraus

Yes.

10:12:34:24

Interviewer

So it was a big family business, and you were a very close family?

10:12:39:05

Sara Kraus

Yes. My grandfather was in textiles - both grandfathers. The whole family was in textiles.

10:12:44:13

Interviewer

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

10:12:46:14

Sara Kraus

Yes, there was a sister and a brother.

10:12:50:00

Interviewer

And how religious was your family?

10:12:52:10

Sara Kraus

Oh, very.

10:12:53:23

Interviewer

Did you keep a kosher home?

10:12:55:07

Sara Kraus

Oh! Definitely. Not only kosher home, Shabbat, the sabbath, Saturday. You know, very religious, thank God.

10:13:05:11

Interviewer

And what about your schooling? What kind of schooling did you have?

10:13:09:02

Sara Kraus

Well, I was born in Pressburg – Bratislava - and there was a Jewish school. So I went to the Jewish school. There were places there were no Jewish schools, so we went to non-Jewish schools, but still somehow, I went to Switzerland, for instance. I was in Switzerland at the end of the war, and there were no Jewish schools, so we went to school, and we had to go on Saturday, but we didn't carry. You don't carry, we don't carry on Saturday, you see, in the street. So we didn't carry the books and the teachers knew that. It kept our religious all way, all way along, all the time.

10:13:52:24

Interviewer

And do you remember ever experiencing antisemitism and, and the fact that there were people who did not believe in Judaism like you did?

10:14:05:16

Sara Kraus

I did meet it, not too many, because we, we had a very big circle of friends. We kept to that; we didn't go out of that circle.

10:14:13:13

Interviewer

So you were very much involved in the, in the Jewish community and didn't really exit from it?

10:14:18:04

Sara Kraus

No. No. There was no reason. No, no need to. We were all very, very religious. My, my grandfather and my aunties and aunts and everybody the same milieu, the same,

10:14:32:11

Interviewer

But then things were starting to change in Europe, weren't they? Were you aware of what was happening with Hitler, the rise of Hitler and the Nazis?

10:14:39:17

Sara Kraus

How I remember, yes, yes. But still we kept to our religion.

10:14:45:10

Interviewer

So what, what do you remember about the rise of the Nazis?

10:14:50:12

Sara Kraus

The trouble we had, the troubles. First of all we had to wear a, a star to the clothes, a yellow star. You've heard about that? We had to wear the yellow star, even the children had to wear a very, very yellow star, and the whole you know, the, we, we didn't go much on the street, you know. Afraid, because there were non-Jews who attacked you when you're a Jew, so I didn't go too much out. Our parents didn't let us too much out. This is -, it was tough in the end. It's, it's amazing that my sister and me how much you understood at this age already. Because circumstances made you understand.

10:15:40:15

Interviewer

Did your parents try to protect you from what was happening, or did they keep you informed with what was happening in Europe?

10:15:47:16

Sara Kraus

Nothing informed, we were children, we were, but we felt it, we saw it. How can they protect me? We were, we were there. They-, we saw what happened, and they couldn't much protect.

10:16:00:21

Interviewer

So the Germans occupied Czechoslovakia, didn't they, on the 15th of March in 1939?

10:16:06:10

Sara Kraus

Yes.

10:16:07:08

Interviewer

Do you remember that?

10:16:08:12

Sara Kraus

Oh yes. I wasn't in Czechoslovakia anymore. I was, but in another part because we had to flee there. Imagine. Yes, I remember the day, oh, I remember it.

10:16:18:23

Interviewer

What can you remember?

10:16:20:13

Sara Kraus

I can remember that they marched in. We stood on the street, and we watched them march in. And saw a lot what happened then, and then we, we, and then we escaped to another town in Czechoslovakia. Then we had to live in that other town under false names.

10:16:43:07

Interviewer

So just in terms of the, um, dates, can I just be clear? You um, you left Bratislava to go to Budapest?

10:16:51:10

Sara Kraus

Yes.

10:16:52:01

Interviewer

And you were about eight or nine years old, is that right?

10:16:54:11

Sara Kraus

Yes.

10:16:55:20

Interviewer

Do you remember going to Budapest? Do you remember arriving?

10:16:59:10

Sara Kraus

Yes.

10:17:00:08

Interviewer

And you were, you were given false passports?

10:17:03:16

Sara Kraus

Well, I wen-, we registered. I couldn't go with the family. They were afraid. The families didn't go together because in case they catch one person they should catch the whole family. I went with an aunt of mine.

10:17:16:15

Interviewer

And what was your made-up name?

10:17:20:12

Sara Kraus

I can't remember.

10:17:21:19

Interviewer

You were, with a false passport though. Is that right?

10:17:23:12

Sara Kraus

Yes.

10:17:24:24

Interviewer

And did you remember any of the details that you had to pretend?

10:17:28:14

Sara Kraus

Yes, yes, I, I had to pretend I'm another person. Not to forget, that was very important, that I had a, a -, I practiced this at home still, before I left with my, my father. My father. My mother and my father. My name, the other name. And they explained to me, you've got to have another name and you got, you know. In those days, children were mature. That's what I can only understand.

10:17:57:14

Interviewer

So you went to Budapest with an aunt?

10:17:59:23

Sara Kraus

Yah.

10:18:00:18

Interviewer

And then all of your family eventually gathered in Budapest? Everybody was successfully able to get to Budapest?

10:18:08:00

Sara Kraus

Yah, I didn't exactly know when they came or what, because they were afraid not to tell the children in case they, they spoke, they talked.

10:18:16:14

Interviewer

And, and what happened when you eventually arrived in Budapest?

10:18:19:23

Sara Kraus

I had a cousin - who lived there.

10:18:21:12

Interviewer

Yes?

10:18:22:00

Sara Kraus

I went to her. We arrived -, We came -, she knew we coming and she came to fetch us from the station. I went to her. She lived as -, at the time in Budapest. And then we couldn't stay there too long because she was in danger. So they think, find, found us different names and different passports, and we had to go to families. For money.

10:18:51:07

Interviewer

Do you want to tell me a bit more about when you were in Budapest and when you were hiding with your aunt?

10:18:59:21

Sara Kraus

In Budapest, there were all sorts of periods. I didn't hide with her. She left with my family and she went home. She just took me there. Too dangerous I should say she left me with strangers. I mean, very nice people, I remember them. But she just took me there.

10:19:22:07

Interviewer

And this is when you were in your-, with the false papers, weren't you? You were being somebody else? Who was it who took you in? Do you remember?

10:19:31:06

Sara Kraus

Elderly couple. They got a lot of money for that.

10:19:34:17

Interviewer

Your parents paid them?

10:19:36:19

Sara Kraus

Yah. They had, they had [?].

10:19:39:10

Interviewer

But they put their life in danger didn't they?

10:19:40:09

Sara Kraus

Yeah, yeah, that was I want to say. They definitely but they got a lot of money and people never had money, so, many, many people did this. So, it was all right. It was very nice relationship. And I understood the relationship, my par-, parents told me. That's it.

10:20:00:03

Interviewer

How long were you with them?

10:20:02:08

Sara Kraus

How long? About six months. [pause] My aunt came sometimes, and my mother came. my father didn't. My mother -, so I do see, sees the family. And my sister was with me. I don't know how much she understood. She was much younger than me, but then we were together and that's it.

10:20:28:11

Interviewer

How long was it before the rest of your family came?

10:20:34:19

Sara Kraus

As soon as they cou-, I can't tell you exactly, soon as they can, could, they came.

10:20:39:16

Interviewer

And do you remember all being reunited there? So it must have felt like a relief that you'd all made it.

10:20:46:20

Sara Kraus

Yes, but you couldn't, you couldn't stay together, or live together. You could see each other. You, you knew you were safe, you were here, but I remember seeing my father. That was it. Just saw him, I couldn't stay with him. My father was specially worried because he was frightened, scared stiff. You couldn't let him on the street he was so frightened. And my mother she wasn't frightened at all. She just went out and arranged the things she had to, her nature.

10:21:18:21

Interviewer

But the men were, at this stage, more in danger than the women, weren't they?

10:21:23:01

Sara Kraus

Probably, I don't know. My, my father was altogether such a nature.

10:21:28:19

Interviewer

Say that again, sorry?

10:21:29:23

Sara Kraus

My father was such a nature. He was scared stiff. And my mother was,

10:21:37:19

Interviewer

So she would go out to look for food, she would go out to -

10:21:40:11

Sara Kraus [*interrupting Interviewer*]

She would go out and she did it all.

10:21:41:20

Interviewer

She did it all. And what did your father do?

10:21:46:13

Sara Kraus

My father learned. He learned all his life. Scriptures. [*Pause*]

10:22:01:13

Interviewer

So he stayed in and, and learned? And your mother did that.

10:22:04:20

Sara Kraus

Beside the business. When they opened a business he was in the business.

10:22:08:20

Interviewer

What kind of things did your mother organise? What jobs did she have to do?

10:22:14:11

Sara Kraus

Well, first of all, to save the family - that was a job enough. To see all the paper signed, all the, and, and you know. And she helped a lot of people from the family. Nothing really could help themselves; you know? Some people were so incapable. She was very good. She saved a lot of people, my mother.

10:22:36:11

Interviewer

One of her plans was to take you all to Israel, wasn't it? Can you tell me more about that?

10:22:42:03

Sara Kraus

About going to Israel?

10:22:43:22

Interviewer

Your mother's plan was to buy you a passage to Israel.

10:22:47:17

Sara Kraus

It, we wanted to go to Israel. But I, I was the one who instigated this. I said I want to go to Israel, I want to go to Israel, and I pushed them. I said, what are we doing here, here, I want to go to Israel.

10:23:01:21

Interviewer

So your mother bought a passage to Israel for all of you?

10:23:04:18

Sara Kraus

We -, I, I don't know how we got the money, I don't know. I can't remember now.

10:23:08:04

Interviewer

And you got on a train, and the journey was via Spain?

10:23:11:02

Sara Kraus

And it wasn't so easy to get on this train. But we got it, we got it, er, tickets, went on the train. There were a hell of a lot of Jews on the train. There was a very well-known rabbi on the train.

10:23:25:03

Interviewer

So you thought you were going to Spain?

10:23:27:12

Sara Kraus

Well, we didn't know. We didn't know we go to -, We, we knew, we didn't know where we were going. We knew, we thought Israel. But on the way we stopped in Spain. So this was a disappointment for us. We stopped in Spain, and then we continued from there. I can't tell you exact, I can't remember, but I know it was a disappointment that we went to Spain. We supposed, we thought we were going to Israel.

10:23:56:08

Interviewer

And then somehow you ended up in Bergen Belsen?

10:24:00:14

Sara Kraus

Yes.

10:24:01:10

Interviewer

So how did that happen? You were on a train you thought to Israel, you ended up in Spain, but the train -

10:24:07:21

Sara Kraus [*talking over Interviewer*]

Yes, because,

10:24:08:02

Interviewer

- got diverted to Bergen-Belsen.

10:24:10:15

Sara Kraus

Because we were on the train. I can't tell you exactly. Yes, we found ourselves in, in Bergen-Belsen. How was this with my parents. We found ourselves in Belsen.

10:24:28:24

Interviewer

So do you remember the day that you arrived in Belsen?

10:24:31:14

Sara Kraus

Yeah, yeah. I remember very well Belsen. The day I left it, to the day I came in and the day I left.

10:24:41:22

Interviewer

So when you arrived in Belsen, you were seven or eight?

10:24:46:09

Sara Kraus

No, I was more.

10:24:47:24

Interviewer

Eight, nearly eight?

10:24:49:09

Sara Kraus

At least eight.

10:24:50:07

Interviewer

Okay. So before we talk about what it was like in Belsen, can you explain to me the journey. You were on the train, you thought you were going to Spain. What was the train like?

10:25:03:20

Sara Kraus

The train was no, no beds or no, We slept on the, on the seats. I don't even, I don't know where we got kosher food. I don't know. I can't remember that.

10:25:21:19

Interviewer

What were you wearing on the train. Do you remember?

10:25:25:22

Sara Kraus

Yes, we had peasant's clothes. Peasant, peasant clothes.

10:25:30:15

Interviewer

So you were redressed into, into peasants' clothes to keep yourself disguised?

10:25:35:02

Sara Kraus

- you know the Jews.

10:25:36:21

Interviewer

Pardon?

10:25:37:19

Sara Kraus

They shouldn't know that they're Jews. I want -, along the way somehow, yes.

10:25:47:08

Interviewer

Can you describe to me a little bit more about that journey, Sara? You were dressed as a peasant. It was very crowded. You thought you were going to Spain. Well, you thought you were going to Israel, and you lost your parents, didn't you, at one point?

10:26:02:14

Sara Kraus

Ah, yes. It's long since I didn't think of it. I went on the train, and I had an aunt who travelled with me. She didn't say she, she's related to me, but I shouldn't be on my own, and she travelled in any case. People travelled all sorts of places to, to, to, to save themselves. So I travelled with that aunt. So my mother said you travel with this auntie, she'll be on your train, and you must watch her. When she gets off the train, you get off. And that's how it was. I was on the train, and this aunt was on the train as well. And what I remember very well, I had a doll from home. Because I had nothing. I couldn't take anything from home, because I had different name, not my real name. So I had this doll with me, and that kept me in touch with my home. And I had, I don't know I had food on the train. My mother gave me, because I had, could keep kosher all the way more or less. There was one period when I couldn't keep kosher. But we more or less kept, could keep it kosher all the way.

10:27:21:15

Interviewer

And then eventually you arrived, or how long were you on that train? Do you know?

10:27:25:24

Sara Kraus

Not very long. Three days. Four days?

10:27:30:21

Interviewer

And eventually you arrived in Bergen-Belsen, which must have been a shock?

10:27:35:04

Sara Kraus

Yes, well. I didn't even understand what Bergen-Belsen is. My parents knew. I didn't understand Bergen-Belsen. I was a child. I saw, soon enough I saw, but I didn't know when we get there.

10:27:51:16

Interviewer

What happened when you arrived?

10:27:54:13

Sara Kraus

When we first went into the -, It was very strange for me, went into this place and huge gates opened and all of us, it was 1,600 people all went in,

10:28:10:13

and then they told us to find men and women separate, that were barracks. So to find us men and women separate barracks, which we did.

10:28:23:09

And we stayed in these barracks. Well, I don't know how many people were to a barrack, 1,000 or something? Can't remember now. I know we were with my mother, my brother, my sister and my mother and me, and my father was in another barrack with the men.

10:28:46:16

Interviewer

And you were put in a star camp, weren't you?

10:28:48:21

Sara Kraus

Yes.

10:28:49:08

Interviewer

Can you describe to me what the, what that meant?

10:28:53:03

Sara Kraus [*talking over Interviewer*]

They are difficult,

10:28:53:03

Interviewer

Why, why were you in a star camp?

10:28:55:14

Sara Kraus

Because we take -, we paid the Germans to go to Spain. You see we paid them to go from Hungary to Spain. And instead they took us to Belsen. So because of that we were on the better train. We were on the train in better condition because of that, because we paid the Germans money. And then we arrived in Belsen.

10:29:23:08

Interviewer

And you were kept in slightly better conditions than the other prisoners?

10:29:26:23

Sara Kraus

In Belsen?

10:29:27:17

Interviewer

Yes.

10:29:27:23

Sara Kraus

Yes, we didn't have to work. All the others worked.

10:29:30:04

Interviewer

And you could still wear your own clothes, couldn't you?

10:29:32:15

Sara Kraus

Yes.

[cut for sound]

10:29:34:12

Interviewer

We want to talk a little bit more about the star camp, because, because you had paid the Germans some money, potentially you could be used as pawns. Is that how you understood it?

10:29:48:05

Sara Kraus

Yes, we were in slightly better condition. We got more food, although we didn't get -, I mean we were hungry all the time. But we got more food than the others. [Pause] That was, that was, you know, it was very, very hard.

10:30:10:02

Interviewer

What were your, um, what was your barrack like? What was your accommodation like? How many people slept in a bunk?

10:30:18:02

Sara Kraus

There were three-tier banks. And everybody had their own, own, own bank [sic]. Except my mother and the siblings slept together, but other than that my mother slept on her own. And, er, that's where we were,

10:30:40:15

and, er, food, we had very little food, we had no food, very, very little food. My mother was very -, she was very clever. She brought some food with her on the journey already from Hungary. From Hungary she had, she took some food with her on the journey. We didn't know exactly where we were going to at end, but she had some food. So that was a bit of a help, but very little food.

10:31:09:05

Interviewer

And do you remember the roll calls – *Appellplatz* - do you remember that? The roll call in the morning where you were all counted?

10:31:15:13

Sara Kraus

Jah, jah. I know *Appellplatz*, yes. Yes. Appell.

10:31:21:09

Interviewer

Appell. Okay.

10:31:23:00

Sara Kraus

Yes, it was in the morning first thing, you had to go to an *appell*. Two or three hours you stood there.

10:31:28:19

Interviewer

What was that like?

10:31:30:23

Sara Kraus

Horrible.

10:31:32:18

Interviewer

Why?

10:31:33:22

Sara Kraus

Everybody had to stand for hours. Until the Germans remembered to count us. They counted us every morning. They had no reason at all. Those who make trouble. Because nobody could escape from there. So they counted us in case somebody escaped. Nobody could escape from that camp. We had people start -, tried. Two or three people tried and they were shot on the spot. You couldn't escape from there. We had nothing, or no, no ammunition, or no, nothing. You couldn't escape from there. It was big, barbed wires, how could you?

10:32:19:16

Interviewer

Apart from *appell*, what else did you do during the day because you didn't work?

10:32:25:10

Sara Kraus

We didn't work.

10:32:29:24

Interviewer

How did you pass your time?

10:32:31:13

Sara Kraus

I think they made a school for us children, a whole lot of children. So they made the school. The Zionists were with us. They made a school for the children. So I went to this school.

10:32:47:19

Interviewer

How long were you in Belsen?

10:32:51:03

Sara Kraus

About six, eight months.

10:32:53:14

Interviewer

What was the worst part of it for you?

10:32:56:16

Sara Kraus

This was the hunger. And the cold. You didn't have clothes and the winter was very cold. This was Europe, in the middle of Europe in the winter. It was very cold. And you didn't have enough clothes. We didn't take clothes for so much. We thought we were going to Spain and then to Israel, so we had clothes for three months, three weeks, three days, four days. We had no clothes. So the cold was very, very bad

and hunger. Some food my mother had with her, but how long did it last?

10:33:35:01

Interviewer

What kind of food were you served in Belsen?

10:33:38:00

Sara Kraus

Oh, not much. Once a day they called it a soup. They sent in, you know, such cans. Milk now, milk. Cans like this every day. A can of, I say can, and in it, in it was something wet. They called it a soup. Sometimes maybe there was some potatoes in it. That, that we have. In the morning I can't remember what we had.

10:34:10:10

Interviewer

But you remember the terrible feeling of hunger?

10:34:12:20

Sara Kraus

Jah. You don't forget it, you know.

10:34:16:08

Interviewer

Can you describe what it feels like?

10:34:18:05

Sara Kraus

Oh, you can't describe it. It's a terrible -, You can't describe it. It's more than a pain. It, it's, it's through and through you. You don't know people stole in those, in the camp. They stole everyone from the other because of the hunger. To be hungry is one of the worst things in the world -, in the, in the, in life. So that's how it was.

10:34:55:21

Interviewer

Throughout your time in Belsen, were you able overtly to practice Judaism?

10:35:02:08

Sara Kraus

Oh yes, all the time we did. All the time. And we didn't do work, and you had, and you were not allowed, and we didn't have to go out to work. Some people had to go out to work. They can't help it on Saturday, but we didn't. So Judaism we practiced all the time.

10:35:27:12

Interviewer

There was a very famous rabbi who was in Belsen with you. Can you tell me about him?

10:35:31:24

Sara Kraus

Ah, he was [?]. He was the Satmar Rebbe. Have you heard the name? The Satmar Rebbe. He was with us. We had people -, he was the same position, but people sometimes gave him something, an odd potato, something left they gave it to him to eat. But he was the same condition. I mean he was hungry all the time. Yes, I remember he was there and he -

10:36:02:05

Interviewer

And he was able to still lead the community?

10:36:05:10

Sara Kraus

Well, as much as needed. I mean what can you do there?

10:36:10:07

Interviewer

What happened to his family?

10:36:12:00

Sara Kraus

Who? His family? Well, they got, got to Israel in the end like we did. He never, he didn't have a family, he had no children. He had children which were lost during the war, then he didn't -

10:36:25:17

Interviewer

I thought he lost, I thought he lost his wife and his children?

10:36:28:18

Sara Kraus

This was the first wife.

10:36:30:00

Interviewer

I see. He had a second wife.

10:36:31:08

Sara Kraus

Yes. He had a second wife, whom I knew. I knew the first one, but slightly. I knew the second wife, but he didn't have any children.

10:36:41:21

Interviewer

So then what happened to you, Sara? Because, um, one day suddenly you were released, weren't you?

10:36:46:06

Sara Kraus

Yes. Unbelievable. This I remember clearly. One day they were talking about being released. Tomorrow we'll be leaving. Sudden, sudden, very sudden, and the next

day we left, we left. We left Bergen-Belsen and we went to Switzerland.

10:37:05:23

Interviewer

Roughly when was this, do you know?

10:37:07:21

Sara Kraus

Pardon?

10:37:08:11

Interviewer

When was it, do you know?

10:37:12:01

Sara Kraus

Just a minute, what time of year?

10:37:14:15

Interviewer

Well, how long had you been in Belsen, and, and why were you suddenly allowed to leave?

10:37:18:04

Sara Kraus

I don't know. Suddenly, maybe they felt, they have orders coming. It didn't come to an end, but it was more towards the end than the middle.

10:37:29:01

Interviewer

And how many people were suddenly allowed to leave the next day?

10:37:31:15

Sara Kraus

First of all, left about three, 400 people. But this, three months before, and after six months, all the people left, were allowed to leave.

10:37:46:13

Interviewer

So they literally said to you -, they put your name on a list and said okay, tomorrow you're leaving?

10:37:50:08

Sara Kraus

Yes.

10:37:51:03

Interviewer

And then you gathered what possessions you had, which was probably very little. How did you leave? [*Clothes rustle against mic.*]

10:37:58:02

Sara Kraus

There were trains coming that we must take.

10:38:02:01

Interviewer

Which of your family were with you?

10:38:04:12

Sara Kraus

My mother, my father and my sister.

10:38:06:20

Interviewer

What did it feel like, leaving Belsen?

10:38:12:18

Sara Kraus

It was very, very good. The feeling was good.

10:38:16:21

Interviewer

You must have felt very guilty about all the people who were still there, though?

10:38:20:16

Sara Kraus

Our camp was empty. We came all out. Our camp is, is that day it came out. The other people, listen, you couldn't worry about everybody.

10:38:31:23

Interviewer

So was this after Liberation, then?

10:38:34:07

Sara Kraus

No.

10:38:35:06

Interviewer

So it was before Liberation. So do you think you were used as a political pawn, then, from the star camp?

10:38:40:20

Sara Kraus

I don't know. I was a child, don't forget. I, I,

10:38:43:09

Interviewer

Did you ever ask your parents?

10:38:44:23

Sara Kraus

My parents came out with me.

10:38:46:23

Interviewer

But did they ever, later on in your life you didn't ask them why you were released?
So everybody from the star camp was released the next day?

10:38:56:06

Sara Kraus

As, our camp.

10:38:58:14

Interviewer

Yes.

10:38:59:07

Sara Kraus

Which was about, I don't know, 1,600 people. This is [?] the rest were still there.

10:39:07:22

Interviewer

So you ended up getting on a train. How long were you on the train?

10:39:12:00

Sara Kraus

I think it was three or four days.

10:39:14:01

Interviewer

And where did you go?

10:39:15:05

Sara Kraus

We went to Switzerland.

10:39:17:00

Interviewer

What was that like?

10:39:19:18

Sara Kraus

It was alright. We knew we were going to Switzerland. And with a bit more food. Already the Swiss authorities-, it was, and on the, on the way they changed. The Swiss authorities came in, in the middle of the journey, yes? Because we changed from German to Swiss at the border. And it was much better under the Swiss.

10:39:49:11

Interviewer

So when you eventually arrived, you were in a Displaced Persons Camp, weren't you?

10:39:55:20

Sara Kraus

In, in Switzerland, yes.

10:39:57:19

Interviewer

What was that like?

10:40:00:18

Sara Kraus

It was alright, because we were out of the camp and finished. We were out of the camp. And then they made it a religious camp, which was even better.

10:40:11:12

Interviewer

So the first camp was not kosher?

10:40:15:07

Sara Kraus

Well, we didn't eat or not kosher. I can't remember what we ate, but we didn't eat not kosher.

10:40:20:20

Interviewer

But the second camp -

10:40:21:18

Sara Kraus [*talking over Interviewer*]

The children, but the children -

10:40:22:08

Interviewer

- the second camp which was religious, that was kosher?

10:40:24:13

Sara Kraus [*talking over Interviewer*]

Yes, yes, that was kosher.

10:40:25:17

Interviewer

And your mother was able to cook again, there?

10:40:27:23

Sara Kraus

Pardon?

10:40:28:06

Interviewer

Your mother was able to start cooking again.

10:40:30:09

Sara Kraus

Yes.

10:40:30:21

Interviewer

And you could start being much more -

10:40:32:12

Sara Kraus [*talking over Interviewer*]

They didn't have a lot to cook, but my mother, I remember, cooked for the, the religious people wanted kosher went in a different camp. There were 200, 400. And then my mother cooked for all the people.

10:40:47:24

Interviewer

Who was Clari?

10:40:49:11

Sara Kraus

Oh, my aunt. My father's sister.

10:40:53:10

Interviewer

So Clari already lived in Switzerland?

10:40:55:06

Sara Kraus

Yes, she got married to Switzerland before the war.

10:40:57:16

Interviewer

So what happened? She used to come and visit you, didn't she?

10:41:00:07

Sara Kraus

Yes.

10:41:01:12

Interviewer

Tell me about it?

10:41:03:02

Sara Kraus

Yes, she, she couldn't believe it. We were saved, because the family was ruined. I

mean got lost, so she came. She sent us some food, some clothes. We had no clothes. We came from camp. So she sent-, I remember she sent us some more shoes and some, and, and some coats. She didn't buy new ones, but she bought second-hand, and she sent us, so. She is here today. She is in England, yes.

10:41:36:16

Interviewer

You must feel very grateful to her.

10:41:39:00

Sara Kraus

Well, we are very happy. We are on very, very, very good terms.

10:41:44:02

Interviewer

How many people of your community did not survive?

10:41:49:16

Sara Kraus

What in, in Bratislava? No, no. I don't know. Of the community itself, I don't know.

10:41:57:21

Interviewer

Did you ever go back?

10:41:59:21

Sara Kraus

Once, I didn't go much back.

10:42:02:13

Interviewer

So after the war, what happened with your family? Where did you go?

10:42:06:00

Sara Kraus

First of all we were in, in Switzerland, and then we went to Israel. I wanted to go to Israel. I told my parents that I only want to go to Israel. I believe it drove them mad, and we went to Israel, and we settled in Israel.

10:42:32:18

Interviewer

So the whole family went to Israel?

10:42:35:01

Sara Kraus

But only it was my mother, my father and my sister, and I have got a brother who was born in Israel. After the war.

10:42:49:00

Interviewer

How, um, did your family settle in Israel? Did they find it difficult or was it a relief to be in the homeland?

10:42:56:05

Sara Kraus

Well it wasn't easy, but it was very difficult. We had no flat. We had no money to buy a flat. We had no money to buy anything. Slowly, slowly somehow my father -, I had an uncle and he made business with my uncle. Slowly, slowly he got -, we were in a children's home. He couldn't keep us at home, my father. We had no money, so we were in a children's home. They managed a children's home in Israel at the time, because many Jewish children came who lost their parents in the war, came to Israel and they are placed in Jewish homes.

10:43:36:02

Interviewer

So you went to school, and you studied, but you left school when you were 14. What did you do then?

10:43:41:18

Sara Kraus

I went, I went to school when I was old -, 14, 15, I went to evening school, because I had to work during the day. My father didn't have the resources to be home or in, in, in a home. It was a difference. So if I wanted to be home I had to work. So that's what happened. I started to work in a kindergarten and that I, I and I worked and that's how I survived, sort of.

10:44:11:13

Interviewer

And what, what age did you meet your first husband?

10:44:15:01

Sara Kraus

Oh. How old was I? 20, 22?

10:44:19:18

Interviewer

And you went on to have children?

10:44:21:06

Sara Kraus

Jah. Jah.

10:44:21:22

Interviewer

How many children did you have?

10:44:23:03

Sara Kraus

We had three together.

10:44:27:06

Interviewer

Still living in Israel?

10:44:29:02

Sara Kraus

The children, the children -

10:44:30:04

Interviewer

No, no, you. At what, when did you move here?

10:44:33:00

Sara Kraus [*talking at cross purposes*]

In Israel.

10:44:33:21

Interviewer

When did you move here?

10:44:35:00

Sara Kraus

No, I went -, I went there. I went to Israel. My parents were in Israel, so I went to Israel.

10:44:44:10

Interviewer

What was your husband's experience during the war? Did he also have -?

10:44:48:09

Sara Kraus

He was hiding in Budapest.

10:44:49:24

Interviewer

Okay. So how much of your experience did you share with him?

10:44:53:22

Sara Kraus

Well, everything. We discussed it. I knew he was-, was in Budapest for years. I mean he had to also live there, hiding and so on. But he stayed in Budapest in hiding. That is how he was saved.

10:45:08:06

Interviewer

You must feel very lucky that your whole family survived and that you survived together?

10:45:14:00

Sara Kraus

Of course I feel lucky, but then there is a thing of faith. And then you know God does what he thinks right. And that's how it should be, it should have happened. Of course we are lucky, and we were grateful. But nothing happens without God's will.

10:45:35:19

Interviewer

Nevertheless, six million Jews were murdered, so do you feel that was God's will?

10:44:04:04

Sara Kraus

That was ordained from God, and the reason for that too, which can't be explained.

[Cut for card change.]

10:44:12:24

Interviewer

Um, I'm interested in, in terms of religion - 'cause we, we've covered most of your story - and how important, uh, religion is to you. It has been your guiding light throughout your life, hasn't it?

10:44:23:07

Sara Kraus

Yeah, of course. [*Pause*] Religion was all the time. Everything according to religion. Unless you couldn't -, you could endanger life, you can't, you couldn't always keep the customs, because you would have died. It's -, sometimes I couldn't get kosher, it doesn't say [*never?*] in the Scriptures you should die because you can't eat kosher.

[Cut for direction]

10:44:49:11

Interviewer

Do, do you have a message that we can learn from you about your experiences in life - what we can learn?

10:44:58:19

Sara Kraus

Anything you can learn. Be good to each other. That's the main thing. You don't need to -, s-, People are jealous, and they want other people's things, possessions. That is how wars broke out, break out. Be, be satisfied with what you have, it will be a much better world.

10:45:23:22

Interviewer

So if you have a message to your great, great, great, great, grandchildren, what would that be?

10:45:29:10

Interviewer

Keep the religion. That's first, and then don't be jealous. Plus you keep your religion properly you've got everything.

10:45:44:03

Interviewer

Why do you think your children have not asked you more about your experiences?

10:45:49:07

Sara Kraus

Because they're very -, they're secure. Thank God. And they're very comfortable, to be children, they're comfortable.

10:45:59:08

Interviewer

So there is no need for them to worry?

10:46:02:04

Sara Kraus

What, what is there to worry? They don't worry. My children don't worry one bit.

10:46:06:19

Interviewer

But do you think that when you are in a position of comfort, that is the time that you should start learning about other people who are in much more difficult positions?

10:46:15:06

Sara Kraus

Of course but you know, there's children in other societies they are thinking they've got it. They've got it made and finished. That is how life is. See other children running around quest-, questioning or not. No, the children want -, is secure, secure.

10:46:36:12

Interviewer

Is there anything else that you want to tell me about your story?

10:46:43:13

Sara Kraus

I talked a lot about this story and, and that's it. Unless people have questions I can answer with. What else can I tell you? We went through it; we lived through it.

10:46:56:11

Interviewer

Do you still have nightmares about that time in your life?

10:46:59:10

Sara Kraus

No.

10:47:00:21

Interviewer

No bad dreams? No flashbacks?

10:47:04:04

Sara Kraus

Occasionally, but not really.

10:47:06:09

Interviewer

What makes you think about that time?

10:47:98:10

Sara Kraus

It, it comes without thinking. [*Pause*]

10:47:14:02

Interviewer

And what does it mean for you now because food was such a difficult problem? For you now to have a full plate of food. What does that mean to you?

10:47:22:02

Interviewer

That means a lot. Since, since I, I, since the war, I always had a full house. Full of food. Full of food. I know my mother-in-law used to come, people come, 'why have you got so much food in the house?' Listen, I can't live without it. I must have plenty in the house as since, since then, since then.

10:47:46:06

Interviewer

And you think that's a consequence of being starving, that you need now to know -

10:47:49:11

Interviewer [*talking over Interviewer*]

Definitely. To know that when your hungry you just have -, got to, to, to go and get. If somebody [?] and say, if somebody comes to me hungry, I open all the, all the, all the, all the cupboards. Everything. Oh yes.

10:48:09:04

Interviewer

And when you see, um, the situation in Europe at the moment, with all the refugees who are desperate to get to England, what do you think about that?

10:48:20:24

Sara Kraus

I don't think much. What -, they go away from their home. Why do they go away from their home? What are they lacking? They want to make a life. They want to make a - they don't want.

10:48:34:03

Interviewer

Do you have sympathy for them?

10:48:37:02

Sara Kraus

Listen, they should leave because-, sense. Don't want what the other person has.

They had years and years and years. never had this, in, in, in Europe, that you need [?] in all sorts of life. You need what he has got. You'll never be alive where everybody will behave the same. There's no such, no such thing. So be happy with what you got.

10:49:09:14

Interviewer

Would you say that you are an optimist, or a pessimist?

10:49:14:01

Sara Kraus

I don't know.

10:49:20:13

Interviewer

Do you think you have used the sadness and the difficulty that you had in a positive way for the rest of your life?

10:49:30:14

Sara Kraus

Yes, there are many things I appreciate in life. I try and see the positive. [*Pause*] But you know now, I sort of be-, beyond it. [*Pause*] Yeah, you can pray, and you can ask, it's, it's -, but, uh, just that I believe in prayer.

10:50:02:08

Interviewer

Is there anything else that you would like to say to me about your testimony, or about your experiences?

10:50:08:04

Sara Kraus

I don't think so. I think I've told you more or less.

10:51:49:22

Caption: AT THIS POINT A SECOND INTERVIEWER TOOK OVER, ASKING SARA ABOUT HER SISTER RUTH

10:51:56:02

Interviewer

And what about Ruth?

10:51:59:07

Sara Kraus

She, she was in a dreamworld. She, funny, she always thought she's, she's playing a role, like in the theatre and it was her, her way she understood it. She saw it was the theatre, she plays a role. This, this is how she survived it.

10:52:18:17

Sara Kraus

She's a different type.

10:52:20:06

Interviewer

Did, we're you and Ruth quite different, then?

10:52:22:11

Sara Kraus

Yes, very different.

10:52:24:00

Interviewer

How different? Can you talk to me a bit about her?

10:52:26:15

Sara Kraus

It's difficult to tell you. She and me are different people. I'm much, much more serious person. I always was. I shall tell you; she is different.

10:52:42:17

Interviewer

What was her approach to, to the war compared, compared to you? Can you think of any, what happened to her when you went to Budapest, for example?

10:52:52:13

Sara Kraus

I can't remember. I don't know where she was when I went to Budapest. I can't remember. I knew, but I can't remember now.

10:53:06:03

Sara Kraus

So, so, so much time has elapsed. It's gone. I don't know where she was.

10:53:18:03

Caption:SARAH CAME TO BRITAIN IN THE 1950s

10:53:23:24

Sara Kraus

What year I come here; I should remember. I just came for a short visit, and I stayed, stayed here. Um, which year, which year that I get married? '55. '53, I came here to England. Just for a visit and then I somehow stayed here.

10:53:56:13

Interviewer

And where and when did you meet your husband?

10:53:59:15

Sara Kraus

Oh, in, in Manchester.

10:54:03:19

Interviewer

Did you talk about your experience with him?

10:54:05:13

Sara Kraus

Not in the beginning. No, I met him, and it was a very, I met him for two days and we got engaged. He was a very -, he was a very nice man. He was very, very nice. He was so good and nice and gentle. It just worked.

10:54:30:22

Interviewer

You didn't talk much about you experience with your, with your parents afterwards, you didn't speak to your husband or your children very much so, how does it feel to talk about it now?

10:54:44:09

Sara Kraus

Well it depends how much, how much they're interested. What, to speak what, what are my children are not really interested in what. My son wants to know about his father no. But you mean I should speak to them?

10:54:30:22

Interviewer

No, no I just mean how does it feel to tell us? How does it feel t-to talk about it?

10:55:04:02

Sara Kraus

Alright. Yeah it's alright, it's nice and well, there are people worth while to talk about and then er good people and bad people.

END OF INTERVIEW