Reva Kibort
Oral History Transcript

Reva Kibort: I had sores on my feet. It was so bad. The gates were opened up to the camp and people were just sort of staring at it. What do you do? Where do you go? You're living in a hostile country. The Poles are not going to protect you. Warsaw was destroyed. My father was dead. My mother was gone.

We had nothing. What do we do? So we decided to go back to the small town, Demblin, again, where my mother and father were born, hoping that maybe somebody had survived. For three weeks, I walked with my sisters. So what we did, we split. One sister went with my brother and my other sister, Ann, and I went together. And we split.

For three weeks, we walked in Poland from Czestochowa … to Demblin. No food, no clothing. So we started begging. We walked from farm to farm. And again, hostility, antisemitism. "Get out of here. We don't want you Jews," because they knew that we were Jews, by the way, the way we looked. And we were dirty, no clothing, no uniforms for, you know.

Finally, towards the end, after two weeks of walking in the bitter cold of January, we got to one farm and this elderly woman had pity on us.

So I lived in the DP [displaced persons] camp.

Historian: So what was life like in the DP camp?

Reva Kibort: The DP camp was, well, it was crowded. People were given, you know, little apartments, but it was very crowded. But one thing we had was food. We had a lot of food. First of all, we got packages from America, from the Red Cross. Now the UNNRA organization. But we could get food in Munich. You know, we had people went to work. They could find jobs.

I mean, life was not normal because you still lived in a displaced person camp. But eventually the camps were emptied out and a lot of the majority of people went to America because if—you don't remember, you were too young—but you could not go to Israel. They did not allow you to go to Israel.

The English would not let anybody into Israel. Illegally, you could travel if you wanted. My brother went to Italy with a group from the orphanage, and he came into Israel in 1946, the end of '46, illegally. But we could not go. We could not go to Israel. So therefore, one day I was in the DP camp, a new DP camp, Neu Freimann near Munich, Germany. And I was sitting in school, this makeshift school, and an American soldier came in and he asked if there were any orphans.

So I raised my hand. I said, “Yes, I'm an orphan.” And again, I did not speak English. And he said—the teacher spoke English though, the people that were teaching—and he said, “Do you want to go to America?” And I raised my hand. “Yes,” you know.

So I went home to the house where my sister was living. In the DP camp, she had a little bungalow with my other sister, they were sharing. Everybody had to share their homes. And I said, “I have a chance to go to America. Should I go?” My sister said, “I will let you go, only if Etta goes with you. You cannot go alone. That's out of the question.” So the following day I went back to school, and I told them I will go to America if my 17 year old sister can go with me. And they said yes.

So my sister Etta and I signed up to go to America. It took us three months. They called us to the American embassy, and then we came home. In April, it was April 1947 already, and they told us that within a week or so we would be called to report to the train station, and we said goodbye to our sisters.

At that point, I had two married sisters. They had already had children. One had twin babies, the other one had a little boy. They were born in 1946 in the [DP] camps. And we traveled to Bremerhaven, which was the port in Germany. And we went on this ship called *Marina Marlin*. We did not know—we called it *Marina*, but actually later when I learned English, I knew *Marina* meant *Marine*. It was named after a Marine named Marlin, whoever that was.

It was a tough, tough voyage. We were sick the nine days, the whole time on the Atlantic. I was sick and there were about 17 or 18 children, but they were older than I was. I was always the youngest because, as you well know, the Germans murdered a million and a half children.

Not too many children survived.

Historian: What were you hoping for in America? Did you have...

Reva Kibort: Did I have any [expectations]? No. When I was little and I used to hear, like I said, my father used to talk about America. They used to call it the Goldene Medina. The Goldene Medina means the Golden Country, where you find gold in the streets. I never found it. So I had this vision, but when I was in the DP camp, they showed movies about America.

And I saw these beautiful movies, and these beautiful homes. And I thought, *My God*, you know, *maybe I'd be lucky enough to live like that again*. So I had this sort of a picture, but it was none of that. None of that.

Historian: What was it like when you got there?

Reva Kibort: Well, I arrived in New York, May 7, 1947. The ship landed. It was the most beautiful sight to see. The New York Harbor was unbelievable. It was glittering to me. Everything looked so beautiful and shiny and gorgeous. And there were women at the dock giving us hot cocoa

and donuts. And none of us could eat because we were sick. We couldn’t eat. But it was a warm, warm greeting.