



# Video Story Transcript

## Escape to Freedom – Germany 1941

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**Link to YouTube Video:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewsq-5ReaBs>

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Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

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Hi, I'm Judy Sima. My mother's name was Elsa Mosbach. She was born January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1912. This is her story and I'd like to share it with you as she may have told it.

I stood on the deck of the old German steamship looking back. As we pulled away from the busy Lisbon, Portugal Harbor, tears were streaming down my cheeks and there was a lump the size of an apple in my throat. And I felt as if my heart would break even though my husband's warm, protective arms were wrapped around me. There was no one to wave goodbye to us. We left our families behind in Nazi Germany and I didn't know if I'd ever see my mother or my father or my younger brother again.

It was summer of 1941. I was 29 years old and I had never been more than a couple of days journey from my hometown and here I was on a ship bound for America. And I didn't even know a word of English. My husband, Paul, and I left our home in Cologne at the beginning of the summer. We couldn't take much with us. Nothing of value. So, I packed our suitcases full of clothing and knickknacks and photo albums. We said goodbye to our parents. I was a seamstress and I made myself all new dresses and even hats to match. We said goodbye to our parents. And we boarded the train bound for Portugal. It was a long trip and it took many days. It was a very difficult trip.

The ship we were on was called the Nyassa. It was built in 1906 and carried over 2,000 passengers, most of them are immigrants like us. We traveled for a long time and I was seasick for most of that 10-day journey. But I didn't care. I was just glad to be out of Germany. You see, we were Jews. German Jews. Jews had been in Germany since the middle ages. My parents, my grandparents, my great grandparents, were born in Germany. My father earned medals fighting on the side of Germany during the Great War of 1912, 1914 to 1918. He was proud of those medals. My husband and I couldn't wait to raise our children in Germany. We thought of ourselves as Germans first and Jews second.

But when Adolf Hitler came to power in 19, 1933 he put an end to all of that. Laws were passed that took away our ability to earn a living, our right to own property, our citizenship, and our dignity. Jewish children couldn't go to school with Christian children. And Christian doctors could not treat Jewish patients. We couldn't even go to public places like the movies or the theatre or a beach or a park. We, things, every day, friends and neighbors disappeared and we never saw them again. And the words "Sarah" and "Israel" were stamped on our passports identifying us as Jews. We knew we had to leave but it wasn't easy.

We had to put our names in a lottery and when our number came up, we would be allowed to apply for exit visa. And once we had that exit visa, we would have to find a country that was willing to take us in. We wanted to go to America, so, we had to find someone who could sign an affidavit proving that they had enough money in the bank to support us, if we couldn't earn a living, if we couldn't take care of ourselves. It took us five years and during that time came the most terrifying nights of our lives.

November 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 1938, Kristallnacht. Crystal Night in English sounds pretty but it means in German, the night of the broken glass. German thugs and hoodlums went on a rampage and they destroyed over seventy-five hundred Jewish businesses, schools, cemeteries, and hospitals. Hundreds of synagogues were burned down to the ground as the police and fire stood... firefighters stood by to make sure that only the Jewish buildings were destroyed. A hundred Jews were murdered and thirty thousand more were rounded up and sent to forced labor camps and concentration camps. My husband and I, we huddled in our small apartment, listening to the screams and the gunshots and the breaking glass and the police sirens.

And then, in the middle of the night, the phone rang. It was my mother. She was hysterical. The Nazis had made her and my father and the Jews of our village watch their synagogue burn down to the ground. And then, they took my papa away. I said, "But they're making is mistake. Papa was a war hero," and I promised my mother that I would come as soon as I could to my hometown and find papa and bring him home.

Early the next morning, after Kristallnacht, after Crystal Night, I boarded the train and headed for my hometown of Beuthen, Germany, which was near the Polish border. And all the time I thought about my papa. He was big and strong. He was my hero and a German hero too. Kaiser Wilhelm himself had given him the medals. And as a little girl, I used to wear them around our apartment. When I got off the train, at first, I didn't notice anything unusual, but as I walked toward my neighborhood, I began to see the devastation. There was the kosher butcher; there was nothing but a gaping hole. The same with Mr. Rubenstein's dress shop and the bakery where I used to get cookies from Mrs. Goldberg. And now the cookies were all trampled

underground. And then I came to a huge pile of smoldering rubble. Our beautiful synagogue with the twin columns and the beautiful ornate arch and the Spanish mosaics was gone. Simply gone.

When I reached my street, I could see my papa's shoe store. The glass was broken. Counters were overturned, shoes were strewn everywhere, and on the walls, in bright yellow paint were the words "Jude, Jude, Jude," Jew, Jew, Jew. I climbed the stairs to our apartment above the, above the shoe store and let myself in. My beautiful Mutti, my mother, was huddled in the corner, a glazed look in her eyes. I put my arms around her and said, "Mutti, I will find papa and I will bring him home. I will bring him home."

And then I went to their bedroom and pulled out the top drawer of my father's dresser. And there were the two boxes just where I knew they would be. Inside was the Hindenberg Cross and the Iron Cross. I put the, I put the medals in my pocket. And then I straightened my shoulders, and put on a fresh coat of lipstick, adjusted my hat, and I walked down the stairs, and marched the three blocks to the Gestapo office. I pulled open the heavy wooden door. There at the end of the hall, stood a soldier at attention and as I came closer, he clicked his heels and raised his hand and said, "Heil, Hitler."

I said, "There's been a mistake. They took my papa last night. Please, I must see the Commandant." The soldier looked at me up and down, but I didn't waver. I just stared him straight in the eye until he finally opened the door behind me and let me into the Commandant's office.

The Commandant was writing on some papers; he didn't even look up. I said, "There's been a mistake. Last night they took my papa, George Lachmann. He's a good German soldier. He won these medals. Kaiser Wilhelm gave him these medals himself."

The Commandant didn't even look up he just said, "Rouse, rouse," out, out.

I said, "But I've got money. I've got money." I took money out of my pockets and I threw them at him.

Finally, he looked up and he said, "He's been sent to Buchenwald but I'll see what I can do. Come back in a week."

I left the Gestapo office but was afraid to go home. I came back day after day and waited. And I don't know how many days I waited. And finally, just when I was about to give up hope, the door to the Gestapo office opened and out came my papa. He was stooped over, he'd lost weight, he was haggard, he hadn't shaved in days, his clothes were torn, he had a bruise on his face. But he was safe. At least, for now.

Soon we'll be docked in New York City. So, I got up early and took my shower and came back and put on one of the new dresses I have made. The lavender, rayon dress with white box pleats that flared out at the

bottom. My husband whistled. I looked fabulous. I was going to be very fashionable in my new country. We went down to breakfast but I couldn't eat. I had just butterflies in my stomach because I was so nervous. We went down to the third-class passenger deck and people were milling around. And the sun was blazing down on the blue-black sea. And off of the distance, off in the horizon, we could see the tops of tall buildings. And then suddenly, someone pointed and shouted. And there, coming out of the sea, was a tiny gold flame. And as we got closer, we could see that flame was held aloft in a silvery green torch held by a magnificent woman with a crown of seven spikes, a green rock gown that flowed to the pedestal below. The Statue of Liberty. Everyone cheered. The fog horns blew and the seagulls welcomed us with their piercing calls. I looked at my husband, the tears in his eyes matched the ones that were streaming down my cheeks. We didn't know then that we would never see our parents again. But we were free. We had escaped. We were truly free. And we were ready to begin a new life in America.