Dientje Kalisky, Part 2

Interviewer: Did she tell you about how she was feeling?

Kalisky: No.

Interviewer: When you came back to live with them, she never talked to you about what had happened to them?

Kalisky: No, no.

Interviewer: And did she ever ask you what happened to you?

Kalisky: No, there was never -- when I cried or when I got scared or -- I just -- I couldn’t do that. “You’re a big girl,” you know. “You’re too big to cry,” you know.

Interviewer: Did you ever try to tell them?

Kalisky: I tried. Even I tried -- I was very sick around ten years ago, and I was in a hospital in Charleston, and they told me that I didn’t have very long to live. I could get released to go home and die or get released -- or didn’t get released and die in a hospital, but I should notify my family in Europe.

Well, I talked with my doctor in Europe, and I came back -- I went in the plane, and I went right to the hospital, and they said, yeah, they were right, that you couldn’t get through an operation because you’re so weak. I had lost from 135 pound to 80 pound, and even my father didn’t recognize me. He passed by. I kept saying, [whispering] “Papa,” but I couldn’t talk. I was so weakened out. And when he saw me, I mean, you know, tears went over his face because I looked so bad.

But I got straightened out. I had to have an operation in my stomach. And so after, when I was still in the hospital and I was doing a lot better, my doctor come over to me and talked with me, and he said, “You know, this is a good time for you to talk to a counselor about the war and about your bad things what happened,” because he was the only one who I felt I could tell things when they were really, really bad, and I could trust him. And I saw him like a friend, not just my doctor. And I said to him, “Hey, I’ve had those dreams all along, and all of a sudden, you want me to go and see somebody about it?” He said, “Dientje, I think things is worse with you than you think yourself.”

And he was right because I went to this place where they had -- it’s a psychiatric hospital in Holland where they have people who were in World War II and also people who were in the underground, because they went through an awful lot, and also people from Indonesia who were in Japanese camps. So the doctor made an appointment for me to go, and he said, “Now, listen, you might get into therapy, but it will take months,” because he was talking about outpatient therapy. And he said, “It will take months for you because there’s such a waiting list.” And I went and talked with them, and they told me that I couldn’t have no outpatient therapy; I had to be admitted in the hospital. And I said, “Well, how long is this gonna take?” because my kids, you know. And they said, “It can be a few months, but it can be a year too.”

Well, anyway, I was there 15 months, and I worked with clay, and that really got things out of me, bad things. Like, I imitated the body -- I made clay of the body of that man in different ways and made the things in a child -- how a child would see it. And the clay -- most of it that I did was in clay. And I threw everything away because it was so scary. I was -- you know, it was horrible. But the only thing that I saved was this little statue. This is me laying down, always in a fetus position, and my arm over my eyes because I was always like -- you know, I was very depressed. And, you know, this is something very dear to me. And another time, when I was in therapy, I made a collage, and that is something that also is something -- I mean, everything in my house, you know, nice things, it doesn’t matter to me. The two things that’s so important to me is this -- and my picture with my doll -- and my collage.

The main thing with me where I still have very much problems with is hunger. You hear, in Ethiopia, you hear there people are starving. And I get just real involved in it, and like wars, like when we had the war in the Middle East, I got so -- I said, “I’ve got to do something.” You know, this was even before the war. “I’ve got to do something. I’m driving myself nuts. I know what they’re gonna go through,” you know, our men here from the United States, and it’s awful. So I sat down, and I thought -- and then on TV, they had, like, you can write to any sailor, and so I start doing that. And I must have written like 200 letters for sure because I kept on writing. Every day, that was my chore, to write several letters. And from those men that I wrote, I kept five friends, five guys who came to see me after they came back. So -- but that was a very scary time for me, you know.

Interviewer: Dientje, I’d like to go back to the time that the war ended and you finally got back to your parents. Can you tell us a little bit about what life was like in Holland after the war and how you eventually came to the United States?

Kalisky: Okay, well, the first thing I have to tell you, right after the war, the thing -- you know, I told you a very big thing with me is hunger and that -- I will show you in a little bit. The war was over, everybody was happy, and then the Swede, the people from Sweden, they had planes, and they dropped bread. And everybody was running over to the place, to the field, where it was dropped. Now, that already started -- I was supposed to be happy. The war was over. But there, I saw five people getting stumbled and died from people stumbling on each other to grab a piece of bread.

So that’s really how everything, you know, started, you know, where I’m supposed to be happy -- what it is, the whole thing is confusion, you know, in me. So when I came back to my parents, it was very, very hard. I told you that. And my mom was sick a lot, and I had to take care of my little brother, and even -- I don’t even remember -- no, my brother wasn’t born yet. I had to remember! My brother -- right after the war in ’46, my mom and dad told me that I was gonna get a little brother or sister. And I was so happy! I remember my grandmother was there to watch me, and I took all my toys, and I put ‘em all together, and I said to my grandmother, “If I get a brother or sister, I’m gonna give all my toys.” I was so excited. And then my mom and dad walked in with my sister -- because, see, there were so many orphan children in Holland that it was just a regular thing, people who were Jewish went to a Jewish orphanage home and just took a child.

Interviewer: So your sister came to you from an orphanage.

Kalisky: My sister, yes, and my sister was around five years old then. Yeah, she was five. And she came, and from the beginning that I saw her, she was very scared. I mean, so many awful things -- her whole family was wiped out, but also never talked about it, and she still is a very close person who wouldn’t talk about a lot of things. But she does -- you know, I have a very good relationship with her, and I understand her real well. But I was -- I had this one picture that I wanted to show you.

Interviewer: We’ll get it out later.

Kalisky: Okay. But my mom dressed us like twins because I was very small for my age. She was three years younger. So we always had the same -- oh, and we hated that too. And my mother was constantly, you know, cleaning us. We couldn’t get dirty, or if we had a little spot, you know.

Interviewer: How long did you stay in Holland after the war?

Kalisky: I stayed in Holland after the war till the late ‘50s. The late ‘50s when I was finished school, I took child education, and I got a job on an ocean liner, and I went all over the world. So I left when I was 17 1/2 and came home -- you know, like my first trip was a six-months’ trip, and another time, it was a year trip. But it was just to come home, and then the next day, you sail out again.

So, actually, I never really got to know my brother because my brother was so small when I left. He was like around eight, nine years old. And he was a very nervous child, which is no wonder because my mother carried him when she was very confused. And my brother became -- when he was little, he had a twitch, and he was a very nervous boy. And now he’s 43 years old, and I am very close to him. But he -- it’s not the generation, what all happened to me. It’s also the generation, you know, like my kids, my brother, you know, the second generation.

Interviewer: Do you talk to your children about what happened to you?

Kalisky: I can’t really talk to my oldest girl. My oldest girl, Evaline, she’s 23 years old. I can’t because she has problems seeing me so ill and so sick and being transported to the hospital. She found me several times on the floor when I was passed out just from emotion, and she can’t talk about it.

But my son and my youngest daughter -- my youngest daughter goes to the College of Charleston, and she is a senior, and she is gonna go in social work. And she gives me a lot of support, and that poem that I let you read, she wrote that, and she always goes with me to places like -- she’s very like, “Don’t let anything happen, Mom.” Like, last night she called me late to come over to Columbia. “Mom, now, you be careful and don’t pick up any hitchhikers," you know, and stuff like that. But she goes with me all the time when we have the memory of, you know, of the Holocaust. But this year she didn’t go. My son went.

Now, my son and my youngest daughter, I can talk about it, and my youngest daughter, she is almost 22, and she feels like I feel. I talk to schools, and I’m going to talk to her college, the College of Charleston, and she is the one who can feel my pain. She really can feel my pain. I’m sure my other daughter too, but she’s trying to get away from it. She can’t see me in pain, you know. But Phillis is -- she understands things well, and she understands when I have days that I don’t feel so good.

Interviewer: Dientje, is there something that you’d like to say, as we bring this to a close, to say to the children, for the future, about what’s happened to you and what you’d like them to know and to remember?

Kalisky: I’d like them to know that, when you eat a meal, that you should say thanks to the Lord that you had a meal because there is so much hunger in the world, and even myself, I was so hungry, it was just -- people came out of the war, they couldn’t even walk anymore, they were so weakened. And people nowadays don’t really realize it. I do volunteer work at the VA hospital in Charleston, and I work with Vietnam veterans. And their pain, I can feel their pain so good, and they talk about certain things, and it’s also very big with them, hunger, you know, and seeing people die and stuff like that.

But what I want to tell -- the reason why I want to keep on telling to schools or organizations is because we all could be so good to each other if we want to. Give a smile from yourself to somebody else. Be kind. Try -- you know, you can be friends with people, but don’t let an argument get so much bad where you hate each other. The thing with me, the no-no in my house was don’t say “hate” because there’s so much hate. Hate is a no-no in my house, and it’s something that -- you know, I see in the world right now, there is so much hate, and there is so much people who, you know, they don’t believe -- just people I know real well, they tell me, “Oh, all this stuff about the war and the gassing and the people, that was all not true.” Even somebody last week told me that. And it’s something that I hear all the time, and I want to tell the people that it was real. I was there, and it was real.

And if it was the Second World War or the Korean War or the Vietnam War, the war in the Middle East, it’s awful, and I just hope and I always pray that we won’t have war because that’s awful. Be nice to each other. If you have disagreements with each other, talk about it. But like some people do -- like the skinheads, for instance, I’m scared to death for ‘em. I really am. I’ve seen it on TV, and it get me very scared when I see ‘em around, you know, because those people believe that nothing ever happened. So I try to tell people to love each other, to talk out your arguments, and to see the world -- it can be so beautiful. It can be so beautiful. Don’t have hate in your heart because somebody is Jewish or hate in your heart because somebody is black or green or what. We can all live good together if we just want to, because it starts by the people and then it goes to the politicians. But if the people fight for peace, then it all will be good. I never wanted to see another war.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for talking with us today.

Kalisky: You’re welcome.

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