

Good afternoon. My name is Irene Katz, I'm a member of the Kean College Oral Testimonies Project of the Holocaust Resource Center. We are affiliated with the Archival Testimonies Project of the Sterling library of Yale University. Sharing the interview with me is Dr. Bernard Weinstein, director of the project. And Dr. Weinstein and I would like to welcome Eva Kempinski, a Holocaust survivor now living in Union, New Jersey, who is here to tell us some of her experiences. Eva, we welcome you.

Thank you.

Welcome.

You told me, on the phone yesterday, that you were from a shtetl, as you said, in Poland. Could you tell me anything about what it was like growing up in that town in Poland?

This was a little shtetl. The population was 22,000, and Jews was 8,000. This little shtetl have everything. Have Hasidic Jews, Zionist Jews, all organization, cheders, yeshiva, shul, everything. My childhood was very good. I have all my family around. My father, my mother, were lovely people. I grew up between eight children, and we love each other. I went to school and have a nice Shabbos, a nice Yontif Till I begin to understand, it was almost too late.

It was everything that you wanted.

Yes.

Could you tell us something about your family, about what your father and mother did, and how many brothers and sisters you have?

Yes. I have very lovely parents. My father was a big scholar Respected him all the city, not only the Jews. Everyone respected him. He was very smart person and very understanding person. My mother was a lovely person, not was working, was at home raising the children, and helping poor people, and caring for everyone that was in need.

And I have six sisters and one brother. we were seven daughters and one brother, and I'm the one would survive.

You're the only one that survived.

Yes, I was the sixth in--

The sixth of the eight.

Yeah, of the eight. I have two small sisters after me. I was in Wieluń. Wieluń was the city where the war begin. September 1, 1939, at 5 o'clock in the morning, the Germany bombed Wieluń. We lost our house, everything. I broke an-- how do you call it?

Your arm.

My father was injured. He left Wieluń and never me go back to Wieluń.

Were there any signs before that bombing? Did you have any idea what was coming?

No. They was telling on the radio, maybe be a war, maybe yes, maybe-- you know how everyone wanted to hope the best. And even be, nobody can imagine-- in their imagination, think this becoming killing people.

So you really didn't want to believe it.

For my parents, it not was the first war. It wasn't world war first two, was better, but you know, they wasn't

at home. Was things that you lived over, but nobody have some picture of the war. And I will tell you, maybe they supposed to do more, but then you have big families, and you not have where to go. Where do you go?

Before this all happened, did you encounter antisemitism, did you encounter persecution?

Yes. And it was a part in the Poles, what was writing, can't disturb, don't buy by Jews, or you can go in the street and rock about-- threw up at you. Left from the payess met the boy [INAUDIBLE]. A lot was this happened as you ran away, was one. In the native, every human being is-- It's to say, I'm not ashamed. You know, you're not believe this can happen to you.

Did you think it was happening anywhere else in Europe, or did you think this was only happening where you were?

No, I was knowing. You know, I have family in other cities, bigger cities, Łódź, Warsaw, parents, family, maybe not was feeling so [NON-ENGLISH] for the big cities more exposed, you know? In Wieluń, this time, when you in school, and you have family, then [INAUDIBLE] this is your whole life.

You don't think about those things.

I'm not was in politics and not belong to organizations. I know I went to school, I come home, I have my family.

How old were you when the war broke out?

Just 14 years. I am born end of August, and September 1st war broke out.

Did you go to a Jewish school or did you--

I went to this Jewish school till grade four. After that was I went to the public school. I was still learning afternoon, a little Talmud Torah.

Was your life in the public school different? no

No, the public school was only for Jews.

So the public schools were in a sense segregated.

The public school of only Jewish students. Not the teachers was all Jewish, all the students was all Jewish.

I see.

You said your father was a scholar, and a very, very religious man--

Yes.

And was that kind of education important in your home?

Oh yes, oh yes. I have sisters who went to Gymnasium and study more. My father was very-- open minded man.

Was it unusual for girls to have that extensive a Jewish education in those days?

Sure. Oh yes. I think so. I grew up in the home. Oh yes. OK, maybe my brother go to yeshiva to study, but the girls was-- one can be-- what you want, you know. And not was easy, important to study. But still they have at least a 12-year school. This was not so hard. And then university was not easy for Jews.

It was harder.

It was harder to get in, or it was harder to stay in?

To stay, to get in, and they was beating up Jewish students. Was very difficult. Very difficult. This is the reason many Jewish students went to Paris, to Belgium, to other countries to study. Switzerland, you know. I had three married sisters, before the war.

Three married sisters before, you said.

Yes.

Did have any special duties, or any special obligations as being one of the younger children in the family?

No. I grew up in a middle class family. There was still a help at home. This not was a luxury in these times. Was a help.

What kind of business did most of the people in the town involve themselves with?

In stores, and businessmen, and doctors, and dentist. Everything what you want, in every direction.

And where the Jewish--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

And shoemakers and everything.

Were the Jewish families involved in all of these professions also?

Yes, in our shtetl this was-- I'm telling you-- was everything. Was poorer, richer, middle class, and professional and [INAUDIBLE] in everything.

Sounds like a very nice place to have grown up.

Yes.

Were there any special memories that you have, that you retained from the early years from before the war?

My home. I grew up in very warm home. You know I know so much stories about my family. When I come to Palestine after the war, when I met the cousins from my father, my mother. I know. How you know? I know for my father was talking to us very-- Friday when you are sitting by Shabbos [? day ?] my father was telling stories, and I like stories. I'm Hasidic daughter. I like stories. And I was sitting with my mouth open, and I remember 'til now, the stories.

You said your grandmother also lived with you most of the time.

Yes, this was my mother's mother.

Did she also tell you stories about her generation?

Yes. Most I remember the stories from my father.

Is there anything in particular that you remember the most?

From my father you know-- my father come from-- not from Wieluń my father come from another city. My father married to Wieluń from Piotrków, is a much bigger city. And this was very big and famous family, the Horowitz. And my father was telling stories about Hasidim about [? Rabbium ?]. My father was a [? chosed,

?] and a rabbi, you know. The ghetto rabbi was his rabbi, and I like this story still today. I like the stories.

Do you tell them to your children, too?

Yes. My son is now studying Geneva, and work in the library. In find encyclopedia make me Xerox from family Horowitz 400 years back, and brought me home.

That's wonderful.

You know, shouldn't my children know how much I can--

So you had a tradition and you had family history.

Oh yes, I have roots.

Roots, a genealogy.

I [INAUDIBLE] born from a stone, but I'm not born from a stone. I had my mother and a father.

That must have been very important to you in the worst times.

Yes. You see, this is the faith. I still believe it, after this all, still I believe it.

Yes. When did you begin to realize that things were getting bad, that things were going--

Very, very fast. I come to Warsaw, I told you, in 1939 in December, end of December. And I left Łódź, not me, was in the way. Meaning, you're supposed to wear the--

The armband.

--The armband with the star. And was-- things happen on this street. They cut the beards, the Jews. And was [INAUDIBLE] [NON-ENGLISH] about immediately But you -- What does happen after? You can imagine these they put people in crematorium, that you burn children alive? That they threw children in the windows? I saw, they throw-- was thrown a child from the third floor.

And you couldn't imagine that then.

It sticks with you. It's not artists what can bring this on the paper. A poet, what can write about this before? These things were just not human.

Did most of your family--

Even now, excuse me, when I'm talking, I don't think you can believe everything. It's hard for you to adjust everything what I am talking to you.

It's hard to comprehend that that could happen.

Yes, you know, I'm meshuggeneh you know, what's she talking?

Were you in Łódź first, and then in Warsaw? Were you in the ghetto in both places?

No, when I was in Łódź, not was a ghetto. Before they make the ghetto. It was just two months of war, three months. And then I come to Warsaw, not was a ghetto either. they make the ghetto in 1940 and I come September, in Yom Kippur, they close. And I come Christmas, Hanukkah, '39 it was months not ghetto. After they make they ghetto bigger, smaller, they push--

So you had a chance to see it before it became a ghetto.

Yes.

And you could appreciate the difference.

You feel you are Jew, even it was a ghetto.

There was still pressure against you without the ghetto.

Oh, yes. How you feel?

Were you together with the other members of your family then?

You see, the night when the war begin, I was injured, and they took me in a hospital, in a city before my shtetl watch. I heard that my older sister was living there with the husband with two children. And she don't know either I'm in this hospital, and they was looking for me. And my father went to Łódź, and when my brother ran away, somebody took me to Warsaw.

This was when they bombed , you know, the family is apart. I have one married sister was in Warsaw, one married sister was in Belgium living. And my brother was in yeshiva, and my sister was a teacher in other city. So 'til we come together-- well, after when I was feeling better, and they find me in this hospital, and my sister brought me to Łódź, to my father, my mother.

My father was injured the neck and was three weeks not going down to daven You can imagine what this was, when I walk in, my father stepped down. Was a miracle, for everyone was telling this, I am not alive anymore. I'm killed. So saw me, walk down from bed.

For the first time?

For the first time. The excitement. And after my brother come, my sister what was teaching, and ironically my sister from Belgium wasn't home this time when the war begin. This was summertime, and she come home. You know this was [NON-ENGLISH] you know, her husband was a Hasidic Jew, too, and supposed to come back to [Place Name]. Bur she come a little earlier home. And after she went back to her husband to Belgium, where she was killed. Anyway, you know.

One sister was living in Warsaw. One sister with the children was Warsaw and the time after she went back to her husband. It was-- everyone was at the place. We was together a little time. You don't know where is better. You know you want to save the child You send this here, You send this here. And ironically, I'm the one what alive, and I was anytime so afraid, I never want to go away to know no place, only to stay with my mother and father. And I am alive.

And did you stay with your mother and father that whole time?

Not that whole time. Three weeks. My father they took before. My mother they took from my hand at Majdanek.

And your father?

Went at 42 to Treblinka.

From the Warsaw ghetto?

With my youngest sister, with my baby sister.

They took the two of them together? Yeah, they was hidden, and they come to find him, and they took them. And was on the table a little bread and my father tell my sister, [NON-ENGLISH] father, me don't need anymore. But she not was telling. My mother was hidden another place. She was smart enough not to tell

this, but she said. We don't need anymore. My father took the [INAUDIBLE] with him..

Did you know that they had taken your father and sister away?

I was known 3 days later, I was another place.

How did you hear about things? How did news travel in the ghetto?

You see this was a time when was a big selection. And everyone was in this in dispatch from the ghetto. The young people took to work.

You mean a selection to take to the concentrate camp?

Yes, this was a selection. What they tell, all Jews must be in this and this place, and who not be, be killed. After, it was a week then is a section in Warsaw with Umschlagplatz, not far. They took the young people back to the work, my brother, my sister and I went back. I mean there was place for my little sister, my father mother, we hid them. And they find my father, my little sister, but my mother did not find. But she want to go but she was with the other women, and did not give her the [? they stop her ?].

Where were they hiding?

In a room on the fourth floor. In Europe was a dining tables, big time, they had to-- the bottom was a little place to put in some things, a little closet.

For storage.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

And in this little storage, my father was with my little sister, but my father not be going in with womans in one small place. So Hasidic Jew. It was with my sister. My mother was with other three womans in the attic closet. What was so-- did not see, they put something covered.

With you?

Not with me. With three strange woman what was in the same apartment.

I tell you, I walk back with my sister--

And how long were they hiding this way?

You see, in day time they was hiding all day. In the night, when was a little quiet that they go out. You need a little air. And this was Thursday night, they took my father with my sister, and Friday was Erev Rosh Hashanah. '42.

And three days later you found out.

Yes.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--took the mother back.

Did you ever see them again after that?

My father?

Did you ever hear anything?

They took him to Treblinka.

And then when did they take you and your mother?

In the uprising, when the ghetto uprising was --

In '43.

'43, in the end of April, we was in Lublin, my mother, my brother, and sister and I before. And after that then they took my mother to Majdanek and we was know, Majdanek is a death camp. And we were still in Lublin working. We all want to go with the mother, and my mother tell, no, you are young. I went with her, and she was crying all the way, that I'd be killed. And they was killed and I'm alive.

Did you know what Treblinka meant, and what Majdanek meant?

Yes, I know. And this time, I know.

You knew from rumors that you had heard in the ghetto?

In Warsaw ghetto was underground. And when they begin the selections on Tisha B'Av '42, the Warsaw ghetto was knowing where the people going. In the right, don't go, don't go.

In other words, the underground was encouraging resistance?

Oh yes, was resistance you know.

They were saying fight back?

Fight back. you know, go in a bunker. Everyone was in the bunkers. I was in a bunker too. A big bunker, it was a couple hundred people in this bunker. After when the Germans put in gas and water, had not other choice.

Did the people believe what they were being told?

Yes. I not can tell if nobody ever-- I believed. I believed, and nobody come back from the old people what they take months before. You heard nothing from them. I think I was not-- I was knowing, you know, you-- anytime you have a hope, maybe, maybe-- this is the Jewish faith.

And you were very young then, and young people have hope.

Hope and stronger, and you want to live. Everyone wanted to live. It's a normal thing. Everyone fight for the life and wanted it.

So how old were you when you were taken from the ghetto?

To Auschwitz? Into Majdanek?

To Majdanek.

Seventeen and a half.

How old was your mother at that time?

My mother was killed. She was 43. You can imagine, she had grandchildren.

Very young.

Yes.

How long were you able to stay with your mother?

Saturday they took us from Lublin to Majdanek. This is very close, this is a kilometer. It's less than a mile. We was running, running-- Germans. Terrible. And this was the night from Saturday to Sunday, and Sunday was May 1st. Was it a little raining, but it was warm, it was outside. And all the night I was listening my mother was saying, why are you coming with me? You are so young, you don't know what it's like. You need to live.

How long had you been in the work camps or in the work details?

From '43 first of May, 'til May 8th, '45. Two years. This was after the ghetto.

Yeah, sure. Two years.

Were there other people with you from your home town, or any other people that you knew?

No. And you know, some day in the morning, they was telling us-- now I tell you this little story. This [INAUDIBLE] know. No, this was Auschwitz.

Auschwitz.

No, I'm not confused. She wasn't at Majdanek [INAUDIBLE] don't know her in Majdanek. Sunday they was telling us we go make a shower.

This is in Majdanek?

Majdanek, and I will tell you something. At the time the night come to Majdanek there are not crematoriums. You only have gas what comes from the showers, but the bodies they burn outside. The two months that I was in Majdanek, we was carrying stones to build the crematorium.

Did you know you were doing that?

No.

What did they tell you you were building?

No, I tell you. Sunday they was telling us we go make a shower, and I with my mother very close. And how we come to the door, to go into the shower, SS men from both sides. They took my mother, and I scream, this is my mother. And the answer was, You so stupid, your mother go work in the kitchen. And I still keep the mother, standing take me and push me in the shower. My mother not so [INAUDIBLE].

That's how you were separated from her?

Yes. And in the evening, I was crying, you can imagine, I was upset. I saw a big fire, is not-- fire and smoke. It was Poles there too, not Jews, Poles. And one asked me, what are you crying? And I know-- they took my mother. She said, you see this is your mother. The smoke is your mother.

She told you that?

Yes.

Who was it who told you this?

Gentiles from Poland.



[INTERPOSING VOICES]

In Warsaw was a big jail, Pawiak, and it took--

The political prisoners.

Yes. And it was-- give me the message.

She told you that about your mother?

Yes.

Was there someone else with you in the camp that you could get close to, that you could talk to?

You see, the night come and after they tell us, everyone go in the barrack. And you know in Majdanek the barracks was-- I think for [INAUDIBLE] two beds, in the bottom to the top on the wood bridges. Everyone take a bridge and if there was too many people they tell two.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--a nice day. And I don't and -- nothing no I don't know what he was telling. I was with my pain. And a lady from upstairs called me, she don't know me. [NON-ENGLISH] you know, small. You know, I was small. Small girl, come up, come up. I did not have to--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

She hoisted you up. Yes.

And she was talking nice to me. I never saw her before. And she was good to me. This is the lady what I tell you did [INAUDIBLE] after I lost her [? after find ?] Auschwitz. What the best what you can, she want to please me.

And I was close with her. You know, from Majdanek was four transport going to Auschwitz. It's all, the rest was all-- crematory, you know? And she wasn't the first and I wasn't the last, so I lost her. But I find her, after I tell you the story of how I find her in Auschwitz. Not, i was alone, you know.

How much longer were you there before you were moved to Auschwitz?

Two months.

Two months?

Two months in Majdanek is to live 120 years now. Not many people that have encountered 20 years.

And did they tell you where you were going?

No, nothing. And you know when they took us, the transport, you don't know what. You see something you need to believe Everyone has to believe something. Why, I don't know. I think I was the worst. I not keep myself. This I live. I was the best. I was the worst. This the reason I living.

What do you mean by that?

You see, when you tell, oy, she's alive. I need be, I get the [INAUDIBLE]. No, my parents were better for me, my sisters were better. And they was killed. Why am I alive? I don't know. Maybe this is a punishment. I don't know.

Maybe it was meant to be that way.

Maybe. Maybe you need talk to me. And you know, when they took us, the transport to go, we don't know. It was one night outside, after the same shower. You go in the shower and all of a sudden, you was ready for the shower. I saw someone coming in and tell, stop, it's a mistake. They're going other place, not the shower. Then this SS man not open the door. This was the gas. Was a transport for all the people. In that transport for young people to work, what they wanted send to Auschwitz, and they make a mistake.

They mixed up the transport.

And they took us out. In the morning, they took us to really shower before we went on the train to Auschwitz.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

So it was meant for you to live.

You see I never forget it. A second.

So that you felt yourself that you had been marked for extermination?

No, I was still believing I find somebody from my sisters, I had young sisters. And you know I was so broken that I -- You believe this. I never do nothing to be in line, to go away from a selection, to exchange some bread-- I was going so straight. And I not ever desire to live.

I don't know why I stayed alive. I have here a friend, well she was in Majdanek and Auschwitz, too. She was in there. She tell me, a couple of times she was telling me, I not can believe that you not was doing this and this and this and you live. I would never have more bread than they give me. You know in Auschwitz too, you have-- you went to work, you bring home a potato, you give the potato away, they give you a little bread, a handkerchief-- but I never do this.

You never tried anything--

Never tried it. I was once in a selection in Auschwitz. I met a girl from our house, what I was living in Warsaw, in the ghetto, my age, a beautiful girl. Twice I told you, my age. I was small, skinny. And she was close to me. She begged me to go behind the bridge, you know. She was afraid that I would be taken to the crematorium cause I'm so small was looking be 12 years. And I tell her no, I was too weak. You believe she went left, and I went right? Left was death and-- you can answer this question as why? She was beautiful.

It doesn't seem logical, does it?

No. When somebody tell me this, this was standing next to me.

There was nothing logical about any of it.

No. I was afraid for the people for children. She was and good-looking and tall.

Some people say that what enabled them to survive was that they had a will to live. What you're saying is that you weren't trying any harder than anybody else, and yet you lived anyway.

Yes.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

And you even you even said that you didn't want to live.

No, sometime I was thinking to myself, when I [INAUDIBLE] met nobody, I'd better be killed. And you know when I was liberated, this was May 8, '45, in Czechoslovakia where I told you. Was evening almost, the

Russian liberated us. I was two days on my bed. I not was hungry. I not want dresses. I was a sick two days.

At this moment, I realized I am alive and I have nobody. And I am living all the time in concentration camp, you are thinking tomorrow's not mine, tomorrow. You must know we will all be killed. You're not was believing.

But when I was liberated, and I saw I am alive, this makes so appealing to me that I was sick two days, you know, you believe. I come to Palestine in '46. Nothing having-- better -- sure I have a skirt on, I have nothing, not luggage, nothing.

Just what you had on you.

A toothbrush, and a pyjama, blue and green. You know I have no desire for nothing.

And yet you got through everything. You told us in Majdanek there was a woman who helped you after you were separated from your mother and that you were reunited with her again in Auschwitz and that there was something important that you wanted to tell us about her.

I come to Auschwitz and now she was quarantine. You know what is a quarantine. They keep you--

Quarantined.

Oh, quarantined.

Often you went to a block to work, but still don't know where to send us. It was daytime, in the morning was Appell, who not was working go back in the block, and go to work. You know, to work places to go. All of a sudden I see [? Deraka. ?]

The woman from Majdanek.

She tell me, you know, she called me Evunya In Polish, Eva, small.

It's Evanya

She tell me, good I see you, I need something from you. I said, what you want Rachel? I We have so little not plates, a dfiferent plate for the soup, everyone had soup.

Like bowls--

It's a bowl, a big bowl. And she tell me, listen, I have bread here, so much bread. I not can take this to work. You go in the block, keep this bread. When they call you in daytime and tell Appell, put this someplace, then go out, for they kill you when they see. I don't know and I said, yes, Rachel I do. I was sitting all day on the bed. I will tell you, I was much over my life, after my sickness. Never you have so pain when you hungry, and you smell bread.

This a pain--

It hurts. It hurts.

Hurts. Smell bread, and it's not mine.

And you can't eat it.

You can when you want but I not touch this. After me go on Appell, she come home, and I [INAUDIBLE] I handle this, I knew it. She said, you not took bread from me? Until you not give me. She took one make it half and she give me. But I was not touching this bread. And today I prove myself, this is the biggest

satisfaction what I can prove this, I'm still strong. You know you today when you put here diamonds, not count, and I take a diamond, it's not so important.

Not as that piece of bread.

Ah, when you're hungry, you not eat today and you smell the bread and you keep its promise 5:00 in the morning to 6:00 in the evening--

And don't eat it.

This is a [NON-ENGLISH]. You know what is a [NON-ENGLISH]?

No.

This is you need be very, very strong. And after, she went her way and I went her way other work. I saw her sometimes. All of a sudden she disappeared, and I heard she's sick, she had typhus, and they took her another place in hospital, in Auschwitz. And I no hear from her and nothing could not see her anymore.. I work in Tel Aviv, with my cousin. Manuel's wife is standing by a window. And I look in a window in a store and gifts, and some time in somebody you look at you, you feel the--

Vibration.

Staring at you.

Yes, you know, and I look at a tall lady and remind me the lady from Auschwitz. She was cleaning, a Jewish lady. And with her was her husband. I don't know, a tall man. And she did this is -- pointing at me and telling, this she is.

She recognized you.

Yes. And my cousin was thinking, God forbid, what I do, what crime, is she looking for me? And she tell me, you're the [NON-ENGLISH] [INAUDIBLE]? I said, yes. So I looking for you. Have a message for you.

So she recognized you before you recognized her.

And recognize her too after when I look down, but not seeing her, you know. She recognize me, but she was standing so looking in the window too. And after she went back and looked at me. And I said, yes, and now on block was three of us. One was a tall, skinny. One was a blonde and a little chubby, and I was the little one.

I said, yes. She said, I have a message for you, and are looking for you. I said what is the message? Rachel. she was working in hospital. This poor lady died, and she called me before she died, and she said this I go block 13 and then look for that little Eva, and tell her that her last prayer was that I'd be alive. And then she tell me she loved me Cause she wanted a sister once.

And you never forgot her either.

No

When was the last time you saw her?

In '43, maybe July maybe August, summertime, I don't know. End of summer. I think she was sick. I know only Rachel is her name. She is from Warsaw, and I understood it when you are supposed to tell you-- the Kaddish show you a name. I tell Rachel [NON-ENGLISH].

You say Kaddish for her?

You know, when I go for Yizkor.

And you still do that, you said.

I never forget her--

This is the woman who died, and said before she died, that she loved you?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

She prayed that I'd be in life and she tell me, yes -- And this lady was working. She give her a message and she never find me. But she find me in the Tel Aviv. She gave me the message.

Is this lady still alive?

I think so. More I not see her. Sure, she was married, she told me this is her husband. Much older lady for me, you know. I never saw her after. She bring me the message to Tel Aviv.

It's amazing.

Is this not amazing?

Yes.

Maybe that says that there is a reason why people live through. Maybe that was her reason, to tell you.

Yes. You know, after the years, now in this stage, I think first Am Israel Hai, not murder. We never go never be finish me enough to kill 6 million so you know, Hitler wanted to finish everyone. And second, maybe, must be a witness to talk about this.

Yes.

I know. And this normally be in people be writing books so to be talking. History not to be Jewish survivors here and history go in other stories. History you can only hear from survivors.

And I will tell you something. Even when interview hundred survivors, you not be knowing the truth. You know why? The six million Jews not talking anymore. They suffered the worst, but they are not witnesses anymore.

The ones who died can't tell their stories.

And this may never know did-- how they suffered. Believe me.

You were not liberated from Auschwitz. You were in another concentration camp after that.

Weisswasser, I was working there from December 'til May. Ammunition.

What kind of work did you do there in the munitions?

Very hard, you know what is galvanization?

Mhm.

Very dangerous work.

And how long were you there?

End of December to my liberation, May 8th.

Describe the dangerous work you were doing, but why was it dangerous?

This was ammunition fabricate when you make the [INAUDIBLE].

The guns?

The guns. The put in the guns.

The bullets.

The bullets. You active when they ready, you polished them. You put this in the chemicals. The chemicals when a German was working it, was working. He was wearing here a mask and here a mask. I had not nothing me.

You were exposed.

You had no protection at all.

After the nighttime you was working shifts night and day. You go to a machine, you polish, and when you tie it, and you make one mistake, you go in the machines then. One was a girl from Hungary. I was many-- this camp was more Hungarian Jews than Polish Jews. A second maybe, for a slip, she went with the machine as pieces. You know the [INAUDIBLE] machines, you had her hair catch or something. Very dangerous work.

Was it mostly women working in that factory?

Was working mens, too, but not together. And the men was not Jews, was from other, Yugoslavian, French. Jewish it was only the woman, that in this, when I was working. A big fabric.

And this was in which camp?

Weisswasser the last five months what I was. This is in Czechoslovakia.

So you were in three camps. You were in Majdanek, Auschwitz--

And after when Auschwitz was almost liberated, they try the people to take to other work.

How would you compare the three camps to each other, which was the worst, which--

I can tell, the worst was Majdanek and Auschwitz. Auschwitz I was living I don't maybe five minutes from the crematorium. You so smell all day and you know it was snowing so when we going home and come in and they put putting kind of it's not easy. And you was waiting every day for you to go. Was that time in Auschwitz when you go, Mengele make so many said exits.

And after in '44 when come from Hungary the Jews for Łódź. And there was so many people the crematoriums was too small. Was not time to make this all. You make a selection for an happenings you know, and they put your number and you wait for the death.

You know, what is, God forbid, that somebody had cancer and the doctor tell you you'll be living a month? And this you was, it was not known if you come tomorrow to call you, on a week, or a month. It once was a selection I was in the beds was a big mix. Eight, ten girls, was a girl, foreign too but it was a different method. And she had a good coat. [INAUDIBLE] she had begged me to take my coat. I not need anymore. Give me you my food. And I no can do this, and I tell her no.

You believe they put them, the numbers did not come to work anymore. I come home from work, she not was more dead and her coat was there. She not take her coat, she left for me.

What did you do?

She is gone. [INAUDIBLE] You know I have to tell you, sometime myself not can believe a person can be so strong, and can lift over so many things.

As you did.

You know I think I'm normal. Instead be normal. I still have children, raise family, and talk and work. Something [NON-ENGLISH]. Something is wrong here, the chemistry, something wrong.

But you must be very strong, and you must have had a will to have survived it.

And you're here to talk about it and to tell future generations.

Oh I'm strong. When I tell you I never was doing nothing. Really to live--

To help yourself.

My fate pushed me you know. I know that myself

You think it was something out of your own control that was impelling you.

You see, in Auschwitz was all kind of works. Was one work what was calling Kanada. I don't know what you call it.

I just heard about that last week.

This was very good kommando. Why-- ironic why what's good, but the old things, when did people come to Auschwitz, what you took away the clothes, and the luggage, was coming from Greece, from Belgium, from Holland, and all over. This girls was selecting shoes, dresses for the Germans everything need to be perfect. And between the dress them a good dress or they find bread or they -- It must be that young people.

And I was in Auschwitz with a girl what I was very close with her. She left to other. I lost her, she is in Poland. I'm not going find her anymore. She was very close.

And we both decide to go to Kanada. And it was the one with [INAUDIBLE] sure when you want, you can go to Kanada. And this evening after Appell you wrote your number in the morning you go there. After Appell she wrote my number in this scarce number my friend she was small. In my name in the morning. Ida was her name. [Personal Name] I don't know [INAUDIBLE]. Are you crazy? Ida I'm not going. [INAUDIBLE]. I don't know.

My father come, I never had a dreams, not much. I wish I had. My father come and tell, stay where you stay. You'll be in life anyway. Don't go there.

Your father said that to you when your dream.

And I not went. And everyone can tell you when today you can have a position that 25,000 and you can work out 5,000, what's your take? It is not good it's not that he [INAUDIBLE] this was life or death, and I'm not one.

Because of what your father told you in the dream?

Yes. And once I have a dream with my mother too. I was very sick in Auschwitz, and you know in Auschwitz you was knowing when you go in hospital, you must not come back. I've [INAUDIBLE] you sometime is sick you're not can help. When I was a really sick, fever.

And I tell them I'm not be better tomorrow. I not go work anymore. And I can't work anymore. I go to hospital. You give up. This night, my mother come to me and give me a glass ice cold water. And I tell her, mommy, she-- I'm so cold, and you give me a cold water? Just drink, drink.

I was speaking Jewish at home with my parents. It's just the reason I like the language so much. In the morning I tell, I go to work. Just as I was feeling better.

As if you had really drunk the water.

I was thinking I drink. This was a dream.

And when you woke up in the morning, you felt strong and you felt good.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Enough to go to work. And my friend was-- they are that good. I feel much better I will be all right. I went to work and not went to the hospital.

It's as if your mother saved your life.

And this is the reason I say something back to this my parents come and dream. Be doing something maybe for me.

But they came to you at very important times.

Yes, but not now.

That's extraordinary.

They came to you when you needed them.

I need them now too. Forgive me.

How long was it before you were actually liberated?

How old I was?

No, how long was it from the time you came into Auschwitz? To-- it was Weiss-- what was the name of it?

Five months almost. [Mumbles]

Was there a point at which you really knew that you were going to survive?

After, when it was April, end of March, sometime you heard Germany was telling-- you know that Germany is losing. But you know a day before, they kill you. you know when we was in-- Auschwitz was bombed, too. And everyone was, when they bomb our barrack, may be dead. Not in crematorium, but a normal dead.

But they bombed the crematorium? Didn't ever bomb the crematorium. What do you think, they don't know the American charges where the crematorium is? Nobody cared about us Jews.

They bombed all around.

All around. And the smoke He wanted to be finished. They help Hitler.

Did you wonder why they didn't do that? Or did that come to you later on, that they could have done it and didn't do it?



I asked why they not do. I was angry. I don't know who this is. This is from England soldiers, or America when -- I don't know, but I was angry. I was angry. How could they not-- how many life you can save when they bomb the crematoriums? They never bomb the crematoriums.

Now, I look different on this story, as I was not in newspapers. Nothing. I was close. I was hungry. I was angry only. Now I was talking and student was asking me, I'm angry? Sure, I'm angry. I'm angry at the Jews in America, too. You not do enough.

You felt betrayed.

Yes. You need scream. You need to make demonstration. You need do something. Nobody was believing.

Maybe you're not was knowing. Maybe you're not was believing. I know that people was knowing. I don't know. That's the reason now when do something for Russian Jews. Forever a Jew what is under pressure we will do everything to help. And when you scream, somebody heard. You're not [INAUDIBLE] what I can do, you can do.

But at the time at the time this was happening it was just the sense that nobody seemed to care. It wasn't just the Jews or the Americans.

Nobody, nobody. Jews was escaped. My sister escaped from Belgium. She won't escape to Switzerland, did not give her in. She went to French, and French she went to Spain. Franco sent her back to Lyon In France, In France, the Germans sent her to Auschwitz. Nobody wanted to help the Jew.

You felt that you were really there on your own, and that your survival was dependent on yourselves.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Today on our own to, need be strong. And he said I need be strong. I only believe one thing, but this time be Israel and not be happen this.

If Israel had existed then, this wouldn't have happened.

When you have a mother, you are more protected. An orphan is not good.

When did you learn about this sister and what had happened to her? Was that afterwards?

Afterwards, my dear sister what was living in Belgium was met at that cousin. And two cousins sisters had husbands away. And one was with her together she only woke up in the hotel for one couple hours, and she not was anymore. I know. I had lost my father, my sister, I had Treblinka, Majdanek, Chelmno, and Auschwitz.

Where the members of your family had been?

Yes. In Chelmno, I have two married sisters with three children and a younger sister from me.

Eva, we're going to take a short break and we'll continue the discussion with Eva Chava-Kempinski. In just a few more minutes.

Thank you.

Thank you.