

Good afternoon. I'm Bernard Weinstein, director of the Kean College Oral Testimonies project on the Holocaust.

I'm Susanna Rich.

We welcome Mr. Aaron Schwarz.

I would like to bring you some way how systematically the Germans picked up everybody from the most remote areas in town and the villages, picked up every Jew. How they could do this? A lot of people are wondering how it is possible.

Now here is a-- when the Germans moved in, everybody said, well, this is a highly educated people. There's nothing to worry. But this is the problem, how a highly educated country-- nation, I would say-- could become such terrible murders in such a scale that a human brain cannot comprehend that. The way they did this, the way it was planned, it is impossible for one who did not go through it to believe, or to visualize how this is possible to be done.

Now, the way they picked up people from the most remote areas and the villages is they-- first of all, every sheriff in the areas in the villages had a note from the Gestapo. They had to bring over all the Jews to the ghetto. And they cannot stay in this area at all. The Jews must be delivered to the ghetto. And of course, they were responsible. They did it.

Now, being in the ghetto-- of course, it's a long story, which I am not-- I'm going to cut it short. I'm going to go where my ghetto finished. And I went to Debica, a town, a small ghetto there. And we remained only about 200 people.

200 young men became legal, so-called legal, because we were working on government jobs. And I was one of them there and working on the railroad. And the area there is called Debica. And this is near Kraków area. And so we were working there for almost a year and a half.

And when a job finished-- there were several groups. One group was working on the railroad track cleaning the grass and picking up where the transports were going to the front lines. It was military. And then they are going back from the front lines. And they were stopping in this town there, because they had to let through other trains.

And so the trains did not have hygienic tanks or bathrooms. Everything was on the tracks. While they were staying there, an army was going there day and night. And we had to clean that. And this was one of a group. We were working on that.

And one group was working as helpers to masons. We were building a big switch tower. One group was unloading and loading railroad tracks, which were-- they were expanding the railroad station, because they needed more tracks. There were two lines only. They needed more.

And so I'm working on that, next to the tracks there. And the transports with the Jewish people were coming every day-- such a terrible thing to see and to hear, how the cries inside from children. This was the cattle trains.

And it was before Rosh Hashanah. It was already cold outside. And inside, the heat was so tremendous that it penetrated through the boards. And the train was gray was frost. Inside, the heat was so tremendous that the people were dying, and not a drop of water.

Were you able to see inside the trains?

No, but it wasn't a train like this. And I could imagine how this looked there. And they were handing out some pitchers, some glasses, and water, water, and water. So I'm just working next to a railroad, to the train.

Incidentally, the trains were stopped in a town like this, and they would railroad the site in order to let through the main transports, the military transport, to let through first. So those trains, on all counts, they were railroading the site. And we stayed until all the tracks were cleared.

And so I couldn't stand. I couldn't go through the knowing, the thirst, the heat there for a little water. So I grabbed a pitcher from one's hand. And I went across.

A little further, there was a hydrant. And I filled it with water. And an SS saw me. And he took me over, come over, and takes out the revolver, and takes me.

There was a little shack behind the station where we had kept our tools. And next to the shack was a pile of old leaves and garbage. That pile was saturated with blood, with Jewish blood. Every day, people were jumping out from the trains. They caught them, brought them over there, and shot them there behind the station.

And this was every day. Some casualties were laying on that pile. And so he takes me over there, and takes out the revolver. And he says, come on. And he's going to shoot me. And I start shouting.

When you have the revolver before your head, you don't talk with your mouth. You talk with your heart, with your lungs. And I said, please ask, I got an order, an order. An order for them is a holy thing.

And I said, I got an order. I got an order from the train leader that I should give them the water. Please, before you shoot me, ask. And I was yelling with my heart.

And he stopped for a second. And it looked to me that he was putting that revolver in his folder and was trying to go back. That train started to move away. And my luck is he left me alone. He left me alive. And so this is there.

And of course, we were going out every morning to that work. We were counted, so many, so many. There was one entrance, one exit. And there was an SS standing always there and watching how many go out, how many come in.

And so one evening, the problem was there that, if a group finished their work, they took that group-- a group, I mean about 25, 30. They finished their work. They took their group, and they arrested them.

And the Gestapo-- and the Gestapo was next to that ghetto where we were living. And they arrested them. And they took them during the day. And in the evening, they took them. And they, one by one, were let out and shot on that pile of garbage.

And of course, knowing what happened yesterday to a group, we were not waiting any longer. And I, at this same time with my brother, planned to escape. And I planned to escape the same day.

But two boys escaped earlier than me, than my plans were to escape. They escaped right in the morning. How did they escape? They took their shovels. And they took a foreman, also a Jewish guy. He also escaped.

And they were going over the tracks for work. It looked like they're going for work. But actually, they went to escape with their shovels and wagons.

And so when they escaped, suddenly the SS surrounded us, the whole group, and picked up 15 people to be shot. And this was number two, shot twice. And I am in this group with my brother and with my cousin.

And I also planned-- as I said, I planned to escape on this same day. So I had this revolver with me. And that revolver, I kept for a purpose. When I will be in the forest, or going through the forest, some Polish hoodlums, knowing that Jews are on the run-- they have with them gold, and silver, and money. This is all we could take, if you had it, because you couldn't carry anything else.

So they were marked and taken off. Even a good suit was removed from him and taken away. So I said, this is what I am not going to allow. And I made all efforts to buy that revolver. And you couldn't buy that.

This wasn't a easy thing. Anybody who sold you a revolver, and if I would have been caught, let's say, with that revolver, and they start torturing you, you don't care what happens to the other guy. He was telling the truth. And so

nobody would sell you a revolver.

But I had a Polish officer from the army. He knew me from before the war. And I was going out, working, and I got in touch with him. And I asked him about that. And he brought me that beautiful gun.

This was an automatic, eight shotgun with 20 bullets. And I paid him a lot of money. Whatever I could scrape up, I gave him, in order to get that.

Finally, at that time planning to go away, I took a loaf of bread. And I made a small hole inside and dug out the soft. And I took that revolver. And I shoved it in there. And I closed it up so nicely that nobody would know that there is anything in that.

And I kept it-- we always kept them in the-- the bread with you. Otherwise, they were stolen in the barracks. People were stealing each one's bread, each one's things. But when they arrested me, I had that revolver with me.

And my cousin, of course, what was going on in that basement where we were arresting, I just cannot begin to tell you. There were cries, and beating the head on the wall. It's impossible to tell you. So my cousin, he was a tall guy, maybe 6 foot 6" guy like this. He said, I am going first.

And I planned with my brother to be the first at the door. They will open the door. When the guard, the SS opens the door, I'll shoot him. And I told my brother, you grab the gun. Let's try to escape. At least we tried.

And so my cousin says, I am going first. He heard the cries. I don't want to hear any more. So finally, I told him-- I said, what are you so in rush? Let me go first. I said, let me go first. I'm going with my brother.

And I couldn't tell anybody that I have a revolver, because I was still thinking, in case we get out alive, they did not have any right to know that I had a revolver, because having a revolver was a sign that I am going to escape. And going to escape, that's what will happen. That's what happened.

They took me to-- they take 15. And when I escape, they will take another 15. And they always were very perfect. They didn't take 14-- 15.

They shot them. And so everybody was watching, guarded the guy, so shouldn't escape from work. I didn't want to tell them that I have the revolver.

And so finally, it was getting so dark outside. And a voice came from the ghetto there, a young man. There was a little opening, like a cinder block opening, in that basement. And he says, you are free. You are going to go out free.

What they did there is they took some gold and diamond rings. And each Gestapo got a diamond ring and a bracelet. And they almost paid them to let us out.

And the German soldier, the guy who we were working for him, he was a German. He was a civil. And he was responsible for that work. And he came over to the Gestapo himself.

And he says, [NON-ENGLISH]. He says, friends of mine, let them go. You pick me up my best workers. And I need to work. I need the job done. And whenever we will have the job done, I will bring them over to you. And then you have a right, you can shoot them. I'll bring them over to you.

And so I heard this saying. So finally, all this helped a little bit. And then it was getting dark. They were trying to take us out one by one. We had to undress completely. And they searched you.

And then there's a problem. I had the revolver. What do I do with the revolver now, with the bullets? If they would catch me with that revolver, I'm cooked.

So there was a bucket with water. It was soiled from the last night, what the people left there. I threw it in, in that bucket there, and that's it. Nobody would know that.

And then, when I go out, I was dressed in about three pants and maybe six pairs of underwear. And I start to undress. So one SS says to the other, this guy wanted to escape today, this guy.

I said, this is not true. I keep this on, because they are stealing in the barracks. I must. I must. I can't leave in the barracks. They steal anybody's things. And so he took this as a good excuse. And he let me go.

And after we finished the cleaning there-- [COUGHS] after we finished the cleaning, all the searches, the SS has three guys go in there and clean out that bunker, the basement. This was a part of a basement closed in with the cinder blocks with an iron door. And there were the arrested. And they were staying there to be shot.

And so, from the last night when they shot a group, they left all the jackets. And everything, they left there. So we had to clean this out. So I go in there first. And I put my hand in that bucket, and picked up that revolver with the bullets, and go into the bathroom, and flushed the water, and cleaned it out, and put it in my pocket.

And I was happy having that revolver. But somebody noticed me with that revolver. And when going back into the ghetto, the ghetto leader was Jewish. So he took me, my brother, and my cousin and arrested me in the ghetto.

They took away that revolver, and the bullets, and everything. And then I was afraid that he will have to give this up to the Gestapo. And if he will give it up to the Gestapo, we are again dead people. And so my cousin again started to cry and to raise heck.

Finally, and then one guy from the so-called Judenrat-- this was the community. There was a president, a vice president. And this vice president came in there. And he said, look, if Aaron will promise me that he will never escape, you can let him out, because he knew me from before the war.

His wife was a house doctor, our doctor. And they knew me very well from before, from where I come out, and my whole family. So he said, if I'll promise him that I won't escape, they will let us out. Sure, I won't escape. And they let us out.

And they took the revolver. What happened to it? I don't know if they gave it, or they didn't give it. They let us out. But I was under surveillance every day, and every morning, and watching if I don't plan any escape.

The reason when the work finished that they shot you is they were always afraid that we had a contact with the underground. In order to make sure that there is not any plans in the ghetto, anything, that we had any contact with the underground, they wiped you out completely. And that's it. There is no problem of worrying that if we had any contact with the underground.

What was going on in your mind during all this time? Did you think you really had nothing to lose? Were you praying?

No. We wanted to live so much that it's impossible to describe how life was less precious. Every day, people-- when I see here in the United States, this one commits suicide, this one is planning suicide, I can't begin to think of how precious life was to live a day in the concentration camp. I think-- pardon me.

That's OK.

I think it is because, when you have this freedom, you are not-- you don't think of it, how valuable this is. But when you lose this freedom, you see what you have had and what you lost. And so we were illegal. Being alive was illegal.

And so we struggled day by day by night to stay alive another day, because we were hoping maybe that the war will end. Maybe it will change, maybe. But it never-- it took five years. So you just lost all the hope.

And the most who broke down most of it is those young men, yeshiva [NON-ENGLISH], those who were sitting before the war in the shuls. They were learning Torah. They were not geared for this type of life of work.

I was in the Polish army. I was a saper. We were taught to build bridges and to explode them. And building the bridges wasn't just with a machine putting piles in the ground-- by hand. We had a 20 kilo hammer. We were hammering those piles in the ground.

And I knew how to handle a hammer and a shovel. That's why they kept me working all over. When this SS saw how I shovel, how I work, he always picked me up for work. And so this is the way, in the beginning, it was there in Debica in that town. This was as I said. Now, later on--

Can we come back a little bit?

Yeah, go head.

Can we go back to your early years before the war?

Yes.

Tell us about your town. Tell us about where you came from.

Of course, when the-- now, going back to this time when the war started, I was in the army. And I was captured by the Germans. I was shot through my leg here. And we were going to the Ukraines, going back, and back, and back.

And then the army, the Germans caught up with us and surrounded us. And we had to give up the weapons. They were loading us on trains going to Germany, to the-- how is it called? The POW, is it called?

Mm-hmm.

There. And so, at that time, it was about in the evening. Instead to go into giving up the my rifle, I went with this rifle. There was a little brook there. And I went with a rifle, put that barrel of the rifle in that water. And I jumped through that brook. And I started to go home.

So I went in, into a Ukrainian house. I was military dressed. And I told them, look, give me a pair of pants. And give me a shirt. And I'll give you this healthy big pair of pants, and suit, and everything, and my shoes. And he gave me.

He gave me a pair of pants. They were not just plain patches. But it was patches, not a pin, not pins. But he gave me and I got dressed like that. And I went home. Slowly, I was going.

There was a lot of people going back, which were evacuated, were running. And then, when the Germans caught up with them, they started to go back. And so I was going there, back. And we came back there.

Then I came back to my home, my hometown. We were still about a year in our houses. How we survived? Everything was taken away. You just were alive in the house. So you have to eat.

We were a family. And so I was going out and smuggling from a small town to a bigger town. If I took 10 kilo sugar on a bicycle, and I brought it into town, to the larger town, to the larger ghetto there, I could make quite a few dollars to live again today.

How many people were in your family? Who was with you?

We were six children, six children and parents, eight people together. And so later on, when the ghetto was created, we were thrown out from our houses. And we were going into the ghetto in Radomysl.

This was a small town there. And they were a small ghetto. And we had to be about three or four families in one room, some of us sleeping in the hallways, in the backyards. Wherever there was a piece of place in the backyard, we were sleeping, because there was no room in the house.

There was one room, and there were three families. Each one had about six people. And so it was a small oven. And you couldn't-- a little bit of potatoes soup to cook was a big deal, because you couldn't get to it, because the other people were before you. So this is the way this ghetto life was.

And of course, any day we were expecting this, what happened. And one afternoon, we knew that tomorrow there's going to be what's called a slaughter or displacing. They picked up all the Jews, and the kids, and the women, and the older people, loaded them on wagons, and were going with horse and buggy to a larger town where the train was, because this town where I was, there were no train connections. And this town was left Judenfrei, as I told you.

And a night before, I picked up my whole family, and we went to the forest. The forest was a mile away. And there, we were staying over night. Staying in the forest, this was a terrible thing there. When you heard a dog barking in the village, oh, the Germans are coming, oh, they are looking. And this is how this life was there.

How long do you stay there?

We were there only two days and two nights. I had a bicycle. And I paid a guy. I took a guy, a Gentile, and I paid him. I gave him my bicycle. I said, go over to town, to Radomysl there, and take a look if there are some Jews left.

He came back. There are no Jews. So I asked him to go to Debica. This was about 20 American miles. And he went there. And he says, there is a small ghetto left. And there was a small ghetto left.

So we came over to-- so we started one night to walk to that ghetto. And we came over. Nobody could let you in. First of all, there was an order, anybody who is illegal. The illegals were-- who had a stamp, a signature from the Gestapo that he is employed here and there and there, he stayed legal. The rest of it, there are no illegal people.

And we came in. We were illegal. Nobody let you in, not in that barrack, any place. And on the street was dangerous to be, because if an SS comes in and he's sees here are people coming in illegal, we were dead.

So finally, my father-- may he rest in peace-- and my mother had a gold watch before the war. Every bride and every groom had to have a gold chain and a watch. And my mother had a gold chain, which she turned around a couple of times. And I took this chain and this watch, my mother's watch.

And I went over to the so-called Judenrat. This is a German word for the community. And I say, look, we came here from the forest. I have no money, but I have these two gold chains and gold watches. Please, take it, and give me some kind of a-- you had to have a identification card in a room where you can go in.

And they took it from me. And he make me legal. And this was-- I couldn't tell you how much this was worth for us to be legal, at least another six months to live. And it didn't take longer than six months. After six months, everybody had to leave. The only thing left is about 200 young men.

How many people were in your family at this time, or were with you?

We were still eight people together. I had three sisters. And we were three brothers, including me, and parents. And of course, I used to tell them, please let's not stay in one place. Everybody must go on his own. Maybe it will be possible to survive.

Incidentally, we did survive. My brother, the youngest brother, he was about 19. He came with me to Plaszew. I am still jumping to Plaszew.

And one morning, he was at a group where they were going out to the train loading, unloading material what was

coming to get to that concentration camp, because they were building this train. There were three barracks when I came in over there. And of course, it was hell, the SS was with big dalmatian dogs and German shepherds going around. And any time a dog bit a guy, that dog next time, when that dog saw you from a half a mile, he ran after and bit you again. That's how this was.

And so it was terrible there. And he was going out to work. And one day, he comes back. He says, you know, Aaron, we unloaded a train. And I could jump in, into one of the wagons there, and go back to the ghetto to town of Kraków. This was about 60 miles, like from here to New York.

Anyway, and I said, you didn't do that? Of course, I said, don't you see? Nobody is going to get out alive here. You see those machine guns? You see what they're doing here, how the dogs are tearing apart every day, and so many shootings, so many are killed? Nobody's going to get out alive.

Next day, he did it. He did it. He went out. And he went back quite awhile and far with the train. And then, later, he went out into a town called Bochnia. And there, a group was going out for work. And he joined that group and went out from that ghetto there.

And apparently, he was trying to get away from the group going further to Tarnów, because there was still my parents were there. And he was caught there. And he was shot there. This was my youngest brother.

So my oldest brother was hiding in the area where we were growing up. And he, with a cousin, were hiding in the forest. And then they had a peasant, a farmer, who helped them out.

When it was so cold, he let them go in into the stable and sleep there where the cows were. They were warm. And this was a very important thing. They had to sleep all night.

And so six months before the war ended-- imagine, he has suffered for four years there. And six months before the war ended, a robbery was there in that village. And so the police came to look to one, which they suspected that he was one of the robbers.

And he says, you come to me to look for robbers? There, Jews are hiding. They are the robbers. And so they went over there, and they caught them early morning, and they shot both my cousin and my brother. And of course, after the war, I exhumed two bodies. I took them over to Tarnów.

Now, going back again until this Debica. Debica was-- there was hell when I was there. I was there. And I was always in front. How?

Whenever they were shooting people, I was called to bury the people, because if they would catch a guy who was before the war sitting in the shul and learning Torah, and he couldn't handle that shovel, when the SS saw him, how he handled that shovel, he didn't come home back. He didn't come back into the ghetto. So they picked up only people who could work, who could dig, and things like that. And so I was there.

And so this time, some people were coming back from the forests. And we were illegal. There were about 200 people, men. And the older people who were hiding out couldn't stay any longer in the forest-- coming back, knowing that there's a little place where they can maybe-- maybe they can stay alive. So they came in.

So the Gestapo gathered them all in one room. It was called a little hospital there. And they let them stay there. They stayed there until they all came back-- women, children.

And one night-- and this was between Hanukkah and Christmas. Snow was so high there. And not the sun, but the- oh, what's next to the sun?

The moon?

The moon. The moon was shining so beautiful with so much light. And they were leading out those people to be shot. There were about 75 people gathered in that room to be shot.

One was a friend of mine from before the war. I used to go out with his daughters and his-- and of course, he didn't have the children anymore with him, but he and his wife. And I said-- his name was Goldklank.

I said, Mr. Goldklank, what are you doing here? Go out. You see there is no future. Some of these days, they are going to shoot you.

He says, I haven't got where to go. He says, I was in the forest. I was dying for a drop of water. I couldn't get it. The flies, the fleas, and the lice were eating me up. I don't have-- I can't go any place. I'd rather be shot. And so he was shot there with his wife.

Going further, when he was loaded-- we had a wagon and a horse special for that purpose. Loading on the wagon, from under the corpses, he got out there. And he got down from the wagon himself still alive. He was shot through the neck, and he was still alive.

So he was sitting in the side, seeing how we are digging and making the grave. And he saw the SS coming there. He had about 500 zlotys. This was one banknote. He says, take it. He said, they should take it. Take it.

It was all with blood from his fingers. And he gave it to me. He says, take it, Aaron, instead they should take it. And so they came. And they shot him twice. [COUGHS] Ooh. You see? This is--

And between those people, there was a rebbetzin. As a matter of fact, the rabbi, the husband survived. And he still lives in Borough Park. Now, Purim, I was there visiting him. And there, he was.

And his wife was a beautiful woman, young, maybe 28 years old, with a little girl about six years, a little blonde girl, so beautiful. And they were leading them out to be shot. And this little girl was shivering like a leaf. And she was crying, [NON-ENGLISH], with such a terrible voice. And this little girl says, mommy, don't cry. This is our destination.

So when I speak of that, it just cuts my heart. Now, having grandchildren like that, when I talk about this, when I remind myself about this little girl-- how she went, how she said to her mother, don't cry, this is our destination. And so a shot was fired. And this little girl fell.

And then they asked her to turn around, because the SS never were shooting from close range. They were another shooting in front, because the victim was falling always to the front. And they were splashed with blood. So from close range, they never shoot from the front. They asked the victim to turn around.

So the word turn around in German is [GERMAN]. In my house, that word is never said, turn around. In my house, this wasn't, because when you heard this word turn around in German, you just knew that a life is being taken away.

And so she wouldn't turn around and was crying, [NON-ENGLISH]. And finally, he shot her from the front. And apparently, the bullet did not go through in a place where it should be effective right away. And so she was moaning so terribly, maybe for 15 minutes.

For 15 minutes, she was moaning so terribly. And this Gestapo, he wouldn't spare another bullet to finish her. Finally, she didn't die. She was still moaning. So he put her-- rolled with her the boots.

And there's a Polish policeman, which was watching him in the back says to him to-- the Gestapo says to him, take a look. So he had a electric light. He cut the bra opened. And he put his light. And he looks in.

And he says, well, the bullet has done it's job. It's only a matter of a little time. And he wouldn't shoot her again. She was about, for a half an hour, terribly moaning.

And this is how sadistic they were, how life was in their eyes. A Jew was just worse than an animal. If they would have only treat us like they treated the dog, it would have been heaven.

And so this is the way we were in Debica going through such stages. A group was going out there for work every day, every morning. And when this man, the-- it was called the Arbeitsleiter. This means the chief who was in charge of that job. He had his people there working-- of course, never a penny, or something. And he was taking these people there every morning for work.

And one day, he loaded-- the SS, not let the guy who were in charge of the work-- loaded about 30 guys on a truck, which is-- there were a truck and another one. What's it called? A hanger. A hanger is the correct word?

Yes.

He took about 30 guys with shovels there on that hanger. And they were going a little further out of town to do a job. So he goes so fast with that truck. When he came around a corner, he made a turn. And that hanger turned over and mangled all of them, all of them-- broken legs, broken hands, broken, broken.

No one could get up anymore from the 31 people. So one goes through to the other one. He says, ha, [GERMAN]. The other one says, a pile of dreck. He says that, you understand. He says, what did I do now? He says, a pile of garbage. And this is how they thought of this, a couple Jews there in Poland.

Now, you cannot describe exactly everything day by day. But it was terrible. If you had a wife, let's say, you couldn't live together with your wife. There were about 20 girls. They were working in the kitchen.

One had a wife. And she came in during the day to see the husband after they-- not during the day, after they worked, after work, about the 7 o'clock. He says, please go out, you are-- in Jewish, I can't describe it. But you are putting me in grief. Go out.

Because it was very dangerous. If a Gestapo saw a woman go in to the men department, they were shooting. They shot the men. They shot the women. And this was Debica.

And then, one morning, it was end of Pesach. Going out, everybody had prepared some matzahs, because-- how did we prepare the matzahs? Everybody, after the ghetto was getting smaller and smaller, they got in some bed spreads, and covers, and some material, what is left from the other houses, what the Germans left there. And they slowly took it out to the people outside. And they changed for a half a bread, or for a little bit of flour.

And everybody had about, I'd say, 3 or 4 pounds of flour. And there was a bakery. There used to be a bakery in that part of the ghetto. So the oven was there. So we got together one evening. And everybody had a little bit of that flour. And we would made matzahs a night before, because the next day was end of Pesach, in the morning going out.

And at the gate, the SS came in, surrounded that little ghetto. The Ukrainians was there. The Ukrainians, they were in black uniforms. They were terrible, worse than the SS. And that's why they were staying there, because they were shooting.

They were called-- in Prussia, when a group was supposed to be shot, the Ukrainians belonged to a group which was called [NON-ENGLISH] Kommando. And the minute they were ready to shoot that group, all they do is they called up. And the [NON-ENGLISH] Kommando came over, and surrounded this group, and took them over there in PlaszÃ³w. And there was a special place between the rocks and such valleys there. And they were shooting.

Now, end of Pesach-- going back to end of Pesach, we were surrounded. And we were going out to work. Some of the IC were-- we started to go back. And everybody had something with them to sell, to go out.

People took a-- they were feather beds, for instance. They took this material from the feathers, opened, and put the feathers in a corner. Incidentally, if you were three miles away, you knew that there is a ghetto, because the wind blew

those feathers all over the world, all over the town, all over the gates. Everybody had them. And so they took the feathers out of that bed spread and took it with them to change either for a piece of bread, or something to eat.

And so I see they're going back. And everybody's throwing out whatever he had in the pockets, because he didn't want to be caught with something having in the pocket. And we go back. And we were standing. And they counted us.

And they were-- a boy, he was working on the Gestapo there. He was cleaning the-- he was polishing their shoes, making the fire, taking out the ashes, a young boy from the ghetto. And he was there with them maybe a year.

And at that morning, they brought him in. They didn't let him alive, because he knew too much. They shot him right after he crossed the gate. They shot it. And so we saw what's going on.

They right away asked, who is a tailor? I was a tailor. Incidentally, I am a tailor from the home. And who is a tailor? Who tailors? And who is upholstery man? And who is seamstress, and everything?

They separated us, and they loaded us on trucks. We were going to Kraków. It took about six hours to come to Kraków. And this was end of Pesach.

And in Kraków with my brother and my cousin, being there-- it was bedlam. Terrible things were going on. As I said before, there were three barracks, open. The wiring was not yet erected, because it was started on a cemetery.

So how did the work started? Girls, about hundreds of them, were sitting alongside with hammers and making gravel. We were splitting the big tombstones with a heavy hammer and bringing over to them in smaller pieces. And they were sitting and, from the smaller pieces, breaking this into gravel because of the road. They need road.

So hundreds of girls were sitting. And the sun was so sharp. They were burned, so burned from the sun. Girls are never to the sun so far. And this was the girls' work. And we had to break up the tombstones and deliver to them the stones.

And then there was a group taking away the gravel and spreading, making a road there. The road was on the cemetery. And then, further, they took a mountain. There was a mountain.

There were tombstones of old, 50, 60 years, of famous people. And this mountain was removed. And the reason for it is every time they opened a grave, there were the jaw bones and the teeth. And there are gold teeth.

In Europe, everybody had gold teeth. There were no white teeth like they do now. So the teeth were always left. So every day, I have picked up a pail from the cemeteries, maybe 20 kilos-- not pounds, kilos, that is more than a pound-- and brought it to the Gestapo over there. This was just the best gold, 22 carat gold.

Did you actually have to take it from the bodies?

There were no bodies. The jaw, the jaw and the skull.

The skeleton. The skeleton.

So you had to collect it?

Oh, of course. This was the idea. This was the idea. Buckets are full of teeth every day, gold teeth. And we removed an area maybe of 3 acres. It was hilly there.

And then they removed the ground into the lower parts. We had erected such little push lorries, little tracks, and push wagons. And we were loading this by hand, and the dirt. And we were moving the whole mountains.

And the reason for it-- not as much they wanted to have a straight, flat place, because of the teeth. They knew that there is gold. Everyone had gold teeth in Europe. There is no-- and even those-- oh, how is [NON-ENGLISH]? The graves.

Grave.

Even those graves, which were not old-- when you opened them, you could still see the colors, the prayer shawl. And the body was already falling apart. But the teeth were there in the jaw. And we got them out. And this was our job.

And so they were loading this dirt over there for the little-- the heads, the skulls were rolling down that hill. They were along this dirt. We were straightening out the ground. So all the skulls were rolling down there, and the bones, and the finger bones, and everything. And everything was there alive.

Wintertime, when we needed sand to put on the ropes-- they had trouble, because it was slippery-- you could find finger bones, and skulls, and jaw bones on the roads, because this was picked up with the sand and spread on the thing. Now, this is the work we went through there. They gave us this work. And they got them the gold.

This experience with the bodies is so tragic. How were you and your co-workers experiencing exhuming these graves?

My dear folks, there is no-- you were so hardened. There were no feelings for anything, no feeling for a body, no feeling for a man. You see a child being shot, you have no feelings. You were just like an animal hardened like a stone.

Now, when I remind myself of the cries, what the kids-- or incidentally, I will come to that. There were no feeling. Everybody was numb, numb. That is the word-- numb, no feeling for the next person. That's how it was.

And then, at that time, the Kraków ghetto was cleared. First of all, a lot of people were escaping with the trains, going away. They were caught, slowly brought in into the concentration camp, and shot.

And some of them smuggled some children into that Plaszów ghetto, in the Plaszów camp. They thought maybe they can hide it there for a while. Maybe they will be able to get it out later.

Incidentally, one family, a friend of ours, had a child there. And they smuggled this child back out. And men who delivered milk to the SS every morning-- they were big cans. Maybe you remember those cans, old-fashioned cans. He put that child in a can and went out with it.

And that child grew up to be a surgeon in New York Hospital. He goes around with a yarmulke, a very [INAUDIBLE] man. And he is one of the best surgeons in New York Hospital. So this is only one thing.

And so later on, this was going on, building roads and breaking these tombstones and straightening the ground in order to get out the gold from the jaws. And later on, they found out that there are children here.

So what did they do? They gave an order to put all the children in one barrack. And they took two little girls, and they should be the nannies for those children. So we thought, maybe they will keep those children in that barrack there. And then let them have something to eat, some milk they delivered, the SS.

And so one morning, they have put outside microphones on each barrack around and played loud Bach's music. And they loaded, and they took two trucks. And they were loading those children on the trucks.

Their mothers were tearing their hair out from far away. They couldn't get to it. There was no way of getting to it. They were crying and tearing their hair out.

And those children-- the cries of those children, I can hear them now. I can hear them always now. I'll never, never forget them-- Mommy, Mommy, with their little hands up, and such terrible cries that it was just cutting your heart. But at that time, incidentally, at that time, you were numb. You didn't feel a thing.

And so they loaded. There were about over 180 children from two years, a half a year, up to about six, seven years. And so they loaded those children straight-- they were straight to Auschwitz, Birkenau, where the chimneys were there,

where they were gassed.

Did you know where they were going?

We knew that they are not going for life. We knew. We didn't know, at that time, that they are going to be gassed right away. But we found out later they were all gassed right away.

We have to stop for a few minutes--

Yeah.

--to change the tape.