

Good afternoon. I'm Bernard Weinstein, director of the Kean College Holocaust Oral Histories Project. Assisting me today is Ruth Harris. We would like to welcome Ida Schwarz.

My name is Ida Hirsch-Schwarz. I was born and raised in Tarnow, Poland. My father was a rabbi and their ritual slaughterer. We were 10 children, five boys and five girls. I was raised in a very comfortable home and when I was growing up, I was looking for ways to go and emigrate to Palestine as my sister did.

Unfortunately, the war broke out in September 1, 1939. The German army came and took Tarnow three days later. In the beginning, it wasn't so bad. We had to give away all the personal belongings like jewelry, money, foreign currency, silver, gold, and fur coats.

The Germans slowly began to liquidate the-- not liquidate, but they took away the--

Business?

--businesses, the large businesses. Right away, the factories were right away taken away. But life wasn't too bad because they did not kill. They took-- they started to work for the Germans. A few months later--

Excuse me, was your father's business taken away right away also? Was your father's business taken away?

Oh, everything. The slaughter, the kosher slaughter was forbidden were to use, but we had to eat so everything was done secretly. It was very hard because it was just before the holidays, the Rosh Hashanah holidays, the new year. And the people still-- the Jews still were keeping up the religious--

So they used to bring the chickens to our apartment. My father used to slaughter it only at night. It was very dangerous, but you had to do it. There was no other way. My father used to go and slaughter some calfs of cows. This already involved much greater risk. He used to go it was about a half a mile to those butchers-- the butcher's house, not in our house-- and I used to go and carry the knives because it was dangerous for a Jew.

My father was in the house for eight months. He didn't go outside because they had to shave the beard, and of course he was very Orthodox and he didn't want to. Finally it was the case that the Germans came in-- they used to come in the house whenever they wanted-- and they caught some other Jews with a beard and they shot them right on the spot.

So my brother said to my father, that's all, you are not going to wear the beard, you have to get used to it, you have to shave it off. So he shaved off the beard, and then he used to go out. Of course, we had to wear the armband with the Jewish star.

What kind of a town was Tarnow? What were relations like before and in the early days of the war between the Jews and the Poles?

Tarnow was a very-- it was a-- I think 90,000 people were living over there. The Jewish population was 40%. It was a very large Zionist organization in the town. All Zionist organizations were over there in town, and the Jewish used to belong there because we saw that there was no future really for the Jews in Poland because the antisemitic was very large.

And of course, in the large larger towns they didn't bother us, but in the smaller towns a Jew could feel that he is discriminated. Beside that, there was a workman circle. There there was a socialist--

Group?

--socialist organization. The Jews belonged over there to a social organization, and they were working. Of course, they were against going to Palestine. They wanted to have-- Jews should be able to live in Poland like Polish Jew, not to run away.

And it was-- there were in our town about-- I don't know. I will guess about 30 synagogues and temples, at least. And it was really a Jewish place and very-- we had the cinemas, we had theaters, we had the Jewish theaters. It was a cultured city.

Did you go to a regular school or a Jewish school?

No, I went to public school. We had a Hebrew school, too. But I went to public school. I finished public school, and then I went to a trade school.

Because of that, I wanted to go to Palestine. I'd rather have a trade. So I learned how to sew. I was a seamstress.

And my sister-- she left Poland in 1937. She went to Palestine.

And now, I'm going back with the Germans. In November 7, there was the Crystal Night. You probably know already what it is.

One night, they announced that nobody should go out in the evening. Everybody has to be inside. And when it got dark, we heard all the-- we heard that they were bombing.

They were bombing the synagogues, that one that couldn't be burnt-- and all the synagogues in one night were all burned. And there was one-- there was a new, very large synagogue with a silver cupola, just like in Israel-- they have it. The Germans could not burn that down, because this was just iron and steel and concrete.

So they brought in engineers, and it took them two weeks to knock down the walls of that synagogue. But right after that night, a lot of Jews left Tarnow. And they were afraid to stay, because of what happened. They said, I don't know what's going to be tomorrow.

So my sister and her husband left-- left Tarnow, and they went east to the Russian border. They crossed the Russian border, and so did my oldest brother. They were over there. Poland was divided, half by Germans, and half by Russia.

It was the-- it developed that we had to wear the--

Yellow star.

--arm bands. There was another decree. On the streets, we couldn't walk on the same side of the street as the Germans. There were side-- the streets were designated. On that street, you can walk on the right side, and on that street, you can walk on the left side.

But all of this wasn't too bad, because you could live as long as they did not kill. Of course, they were rationed. Every week was less and less to eat, but still somehow, you still managed, because everybody-- not everybody, but most of the people-- they had some money left over. They had some jewelry, some business, so they sold it and were able just to exist.

When the American government declared the war, at that time started the real shooting. The Germans came in, and they-- on the street, at random. They used to shoot people who just happened to be on the wrong time at the wrong place.

They used to shoot them, or they took them away on the tracks, and they sent them to Auschwitz. A few weeks later, the families from those people used to get in the box. Those are the ashes from your husband or the father or son.

And from December 1941, it started the shooting, they-- they just at random used to go and kill people. But the real extermination started in June, 1942. I had at the time three brothers at home-- two older and one younger.

And they announced-- we did not have the radio, because we had to give away the radio. They had signs placed on the streets, on the houses, that those who did not have any working papers-- they didn't put the working papers, but they sent in the names of the people that they had to come and gather them on one place. This was the market place.

And at that time, my brothers-- one had a stamp that he could go to work, and the older brother could have saved himself, too. But the youngest one-- they didn't want the youngest one to go along, so they all three went. And they went on the first day. We didn't know what it was.

We figured that when three young boys were called to come on a place, they will probably send them out to work. And we were told that we cannot go out the doors. The houses have to be locked, and we cannot look out from the windows at what's going on in the streets.

See, our town did not have one-family houses or two-family houses-- all apartment houses that were connected, one to the other. My three brothers went over there. And we didn't know where they went, but so went hundreds of people that had to go over there.

And I was left alone in the house. My father at that time went into hiding in the attic. And all the other people were afraid to stay in the house, because we didn't know what was going on. This was the first day.

And I was alone in the apartment house. And they even said, you are not allowed to go to any neighbors. You have to be-- and at about 11:00, they came into the courthouse, the SS.

And there were three apartments on the first floor. They went over there, and they took out the people, whoever were over there. And they shot, I know they started to shoot in the air.

They went on the second floor, and they took out over there whoever they wanted. We were living on the third floor. Luckily, they didn't come, because they would have taken me, too.

They went out, and we could see from our house that the next apartment house in the courtyard-- they took out almost all old people, and the youngsters, and the women. The able men, bodies who had work papers-- they left.

It was going-- there on the market place, there was about 2000 people gathered over there. And they killed them on the spot, over there a couple hundred. Part of them, they took on wagons on the trucks to the cemetery and killed over there on the cemetery. And the rest, they took in their school until it was dark.

And the marketplace was on an incline. And we were living on the main road, that was the main road going through Germany to Russia. It was like a highway.

And we could see from the window-- of course, we looked at what was going on the street. And we saw hundreds of those Jews were running. They were not walking, but they just told them to run to the school, about half a mile from where we live, and the blood was running from the marketplace right in the gutters on the street.

And by the end of the day, we already knew what was happening. I didn't know if my brothers were killed on the marketplace. Probably not, because those people who buried would have known-- people knew who they were.

They probably went-- they took them to Belzec, because this was on a Monday, June 11. And it took them three days to bury those killed people. By Thursday, it was the same thing again.

And another 3,000 Jews were either killed or deported. And it took another-- until-- took to clean everything and to bury the people. They buried in a massive grave in the cemetery in Tarnow.

And the following Monday was the third time. In these three days, they killed 12,000 Jews, killed or deported. Of course, I lost in one day all my three brothers.

A week later, they opened a ghetto. They started a ghetto. They took about eight square blocks and boarded with high fences-- about 10-foot-high fence between the streets.

And the apartment houses-- but it was the courtyard. But you had to go to the ghetto. They used to make an opening in the wall from an apartment.

And from each apartment house from the courtyard, they used to open a wall so that people could get in from one house to the other, to the other streets. There was only one entrance and one exit that they made from the whole ghetto.

The windows had to be closed with black paper. We were not allowed to look out at what was going on outside of the ghetto. And we were-- my father and I were left, and we had to leave our apartment.

We were assigned to another apartment-- another apartment with four families in one apartment. So we were in the kitchen. My father and I were living in the kitchen, with four families who were cooking in the kitchen.

So we had just folding beds, for the day to fold them up, and at night. It was one bathroom. They had three rooms and a kitchen, and one bath. And we had four families in that ghetto.

Then after a few months, they divided that ghetto-- the working ghetto and the non-working ghetto. In the non-working ghetto were the older people, the women and children who were still left. And the working ghetto were those people who went to work.

So it was a fence between the working ghetto and non-working ghetto. At that time, there was still quite a few thousand people that were gathered in that small ghetto. And when we were in the ghetto in August, it came again-- they were putting out a notice on the streets that everybody has to be in the house.

You are not to go out, and people are not going to go to work. So we know right away that something was going on again. At that time, I was still-- no, at that time, there was not a working ghetto.

We're still one ghetto. We knew already what was going on. So two girls who lived in the same apartment the ghetto where I was were planning to go in hiding.

Because we knew they were going to come and take us out or kill us on the spot, because we didn't have yet working papers-- not the real working papers. We had false working papers.

So a friend, a man who was living in that house-- he said, I can find only one place in hiding. If you want to go into a sewer pipe, I will tell you how to get over there. But you must have put on a raincoat and rain hats, and I will show you how to get to the sewer pipe.

We went down in the basement, and before the sewer pipe, it was already damp and wet from dirt. But we knew it was very-- it was not pleasant. It was smelly already, but we knew we had no other choice.

We decided. We said, we are going to go. We went to the sewer pipe, and we had to crawl underneath. We got all dirty already.

But when we came in the sewer pipe, we could at least stand up, because it was-- we were short girls. It was about maybe a foot-- still placed here. And over there, we looked up at the sewer pipe.

We didn't know. So we saw there were openings from the toilets and from the sinks that were coming from the apartment. It was a whole apartment house. We were in that sewer, and we could hear everything that was going on, because this was the courtyard.

It was the grates, where the water from the rain used to go in that sewer, too. And at about 11:00, maybe earlier, we had the Germans come in, and they took out over there the people. There was one who was-- he was an amputee, and they

just shot him on the spot, because he couldn't walk.

The other ones-- mostly women, older people, and children-- they took out. And those who didn't want to go, we could hear the shooting. And we, of course-- we heard the crying and the shouts and everything, the shouts from the Germans.

We were in the sewer, and it took about four hours. And of course, the man who told us to go into hiding couldn't go out to talk, because he was inside the house. About 3:00, it was quiet already.

And he came and he said, everything is quiet over there. They already took all the people. And we could hear the shooting from the other houses, because everything was connected.

By 5:00, my sister was living in the other side of the ghetto-- came to the courtyard, and she called on me. She said, get out of the sewer. You are going to go into hiding where my husband is in hiding.

At least we will be together. We will be all together. The two girls who remained in that sewer-- later on, she told me, at night-- they were over there still at night. It was just awful, because the rats came in the sewer, and there were two girls over there. But they just survived.

The only thing-- you wouldn't believe it, but we went through. When the people used to use the toilet, we saw the water come in, so we already knew from which toilet, where the water-- and we had to watch that we should not get all wet.

It was not a pleasant sight or feeling. But the will to live for so great that-- you're young. You wanted-- so--

How old were you at this time?

At that time, I was 20. My sister came and said, get out of there. I got out, and my father was-- he remained in that ghetto over there.

And I went to my sister. And my brother-in-law was in hiding in the cellar over there. And it was a hiding place. It was a cellar into a cellar.

My brother-in-law's brothers took out bricks from the foundation, and we crawled through in that hole, and after we were inside-- of course, they gave us some food. He put back the bricks in case-- because they were coming.

The Germans were coming into the basement to see if the Jews are not hiding. And they put the bricks. And once a day, they used to come and bring us some water to drink or some food.

We were about four days in the hiding place. Later, we went out, and a week later, they formed the working ghetto and the non-working ghetto. Well, finally, I got a place to go to work.

And we were going out from the ghetto every day. In the morning, we were going out. They used to count us, how many went out, and at night, we used to come back to the ghetto.

And this was going on from the end of August, September, October. By November, we hear we have to go Sunday to work. We didn't know why. But if you have to go, you have to go. We went to work.

And everybody who used to go to work used to take with-- we used to take with us the coats and the remaining dresses and shoes-- whatever we had-- in case we wouldn't come back. Because we never know where we are going to wind up. So we took and went to work.

And it was a Sunday morning, we didn't know why. And suddenly, about 10:00, the SS came to our place of work and took out about 60 people, because I didn't have the original stamp that I was working from the first time. I got later the papers I can work.

They took us out from work, and they went to other places of work where they took out other people. And we were gathered on the-- the ghetto was called Appell place. Appell.

Appell.

Appell.

Roll call.

Roll call. We used to-- over there, we used to stay every day-- before we went to work and after we came to work, we used to stay over there. We went over there, and we were told.

I know there were a few Jewish policemen. They told us that they took out-- and we could see on the place they were sitting already on the ground-- about 2000 people. And I asked them why couldn't you take me out?

He said, I'm sorry, I can't take you out, because I took out my brother-in-law, and they were afraid themselves to take out. They were afraid for the Gestapo.

Finally, we got back. They took us out from the ghetto, and we walked to the train station. They loaded us to the cattle cars.

Before they closed up, the guard came in and says, whoever has money, gold, jewelry, you have to give everything. And he came with a bucket. There was a dish.

And people gave the man with the money. And I had a watch. My father gave me. That watch he gave to my mother when she was engaged.

This is not the wristwatch. This is a chain watch. And he gave it to me.

And I had it, and I did not give it. I had some money, too, because I said, I am not going to go-- at that time, we knew already where we are going. We presumed, because in that transport, there were not only people who work. There were all the people and children and the mothers-- mothers with children.

So we were skeptical if we are going to go to work or we are going to go to be a guest in Belzec. We were going to go east. So I didn't give this. I said, we're going to be killed anyhow.

So I took a chance, and I didn't give that. When they closed the wagons, and it got dark, I was talking to a man over there. And I said to him, I would like to escape, because I have hidden in my under garment papers that say gentile girl in case I would escape or I would have a chance to go to work as a gentile girl, maybe I will save myself.

So I told him, I would like to escape. He said he wants to escape, too. And he announced, whoever wants to escape, please come close to the window.

This was-- it had a small-- it has no window pane, just an open space with barbed wire. But the barbed wire, they took away, and we gathered at the window.

And he said, whoever wants to go first, go first. And the man said, if you jump, jump in the direction of the train. Don't jump backwards, because you can fall under the wheels.

I was the first one. I said I want to jump. And they pushed me up, and I saw it was very high. The ground was very high, and I said to him, I'm going to kill myself. I don't want to jump.

Then, it took another maybe a few hundred meters. And then, I saw a water next to the tracks. And I said, I can't swim. I'm going to drown.

And then, I said to myself, Ida, if you are going to postpone it, you are not going to do it. And I said to myself, now, I am jumping. And I knew it. I'm going to talk to delay it.

I'm not going to have the courage to do it. They pushed me up, and I jumped from the train. I fell. I scratched my-- I wasn't hurt. I just scratched-- I don't know.

Luckily, I wasn't hurt, and I got up. And I knew before the jump, and they said, we should gather all together in one place and go back. I didn't want to go together, because the men-- I didn't want to stay with the men, because the Jewish men-- it would be very easy for the Germans to find out that they are Jews or non-Jews, because only the Jewish males were circumcised in Poland.

So I didn't go with them. I was walking a little bit until I found a shack. I was afraid to walk further, because it was a curfew, and there were dogs barking. And I was afraid that they would bark. They would come up and see why the dogs are barking when there is a curfew and nobody's supposed to be outside.

I found the shack, and I was very tired and very scared, and I fell asleep. In the morning, I woke up. I was shivering. I was very cold, because I had nothing but the dress that I was wearing.

And I took out my watch-- not the watch-- the papers that I had, the papers and the money that I had. And I was picking up-- I'm going to go into a peasant's house and ask him-- I will pay him-- to ask him to take me back to the town of the ghetto.

I didn't know where I should go in, because the Poles, they collaborated with the Germans. Of course, I didn't look too Jewish, but still, maybe they could recognize me from my speech, from my dialect. I looked in the house, and I saw a very nice, clean house, nice furniture.

And I said, that is a rich house, and I'm not going to go, because I didn't have any faith in them. And there was a woman who came over there. She said, can I help you?

I said, no, I'm sorry. I missed the place. And I went further, and I saw another house, and it looked too, too nice. Finally, I looked in a house, and I saw it was a very poor, shabby house, a peasant.

I came in over there, and I said to her that-- I get her a story that the Germans took me. They wanted to take me to Germany, but I don't want to go over there. And I would like to go back to the city.

If her husband would take me, show me the way to go walk with me, I would pay him. And she said, oh, my husband is not home. There was just the peasants that are going to the city with food and vegetables.

Well, I didn't want to go with too many people, because everyone was suspicious. I said, I'm going to wait until your husband will come, and I gave her the money. And he came, and I told them, I will pay you.

Please, take me home, because my parents are very about worried where I am. So he said, OK. I said to the woman, could you lend me a coat? Because it was suspicious to walk without a coat in November-- 16.

It was cold already. She said, I don't have a coat, but she had a woolen shawl, very old. She gave me that shawl, and he went with me, and we walked about 3/4 of a-- half an hour, 3/4 of an hour.

It started to snow. And he said, I don't want to go there. It's snowing. And I begged him.

I just talked to his conscience. I say, you walked already with me so far. And I started to cry. My parents will be worried.

And he walked with me, because I had no idea how to walk, and I was afraid to walk alone, because they would catch

me. We came to the ghetto. Just before the ghetto, I gave him the shawl, and I gave him the money, the rest of the money, and he went back.

And I came to the gate to the ghetto, and the policeman opened the window, and he recognized me, because they know what the people-- my father was very well-known in the town. And he said, I cannot let you in, because the Gestapo is here on the streets.

He said, go over there, three streets. There is a factory where Jews were working. It was a clothes factory. Go over there, and stay there.

It was very dangerous, because all the factories were guarded, too. But I had no other way to go, and there was a drug store that was connected to the ghetto. But from the outside, it was--

So I went into the drug store. I thought maybe if I go through the back door, I would be able to get into the ghetto. But he questioned me, so I was afraid. Because he wasn't Jewish. He was a Pole, a Polish man.

I went out. I took the risk, and I went to three blocks. And luckily, there was no guards at the door. I went up to the factory, and I came in, because they all know.

And I said, I escaped from the train. I was the first one to come. I escaped from the train, and I said, go over there. He said, quiet down, you are already with us.

At that time, I was still lucky, because they didn't count how many go out to work and how many come in. So I was over there. Meanwhile, another four or five people came the same place.

And when they went home, they gave me-- they had additional arm bands. They came-- you know, they came and I went back into the ghetto, back to the old ghetto. This was November. And--

Were there any Jews still left in the ghetto at that time?

Yes. There were still--

Were there any Jews still left in the ghetto?

Yes. There were quite a few-- there were probably about 4,000 people still left, because there was a working ghetto-- the people that were working and non-working. My father was still there over there in the ghetto. And there was some woman left who was in hiding with her children, and some older people, who just-- they somehow managed to hide.

So it was, I think, at that time maybe about 3,000 or 4,000 Jews left in the ghetto. We were working. We were going down every day to work until September 1943. 1943, in the morning, as we always go to work, we came to work. And they said, we are going to leave here.

We are not going to stay and work anymore in the ghetto. They're going to liquidate the ghetto. So when we were standing-- and they used to count us every morning. So I was standing-- the men used to be on one side, and the woman next stood them.

So I was thinking, I didn't want-- I was standing next to the last row of the men and the first throw of the women. We had to stand five in a row. And we were looking at what was going on, and I saw from the distance that it took out probably about 60% of the people who they didn't want to go in the concentration camp for work. They put them over there at the side, and they told them to go out of the ghetto door, the outside.

And those-- we saw the younger people, mostly men-- they were sitting, told to sit down on the ground. Then the manager, the German, came over there, and he was picking up who was going to go to work and who was not. And those men that were working, they used to do the-- for the soldiers, the uniforms.



So it was important to have the men. And I saw, he said, everybody goes over there. I saw him motion with the hand. And I was short.

I ran right in between the men, and I ran with them over there. But I couldn't sit with them, so I sat down where the other girls were sitting. The other girls said, move away.

You know, they were afraid, because they saw that I was not assigned to go. I said, what do you care? Well, anyhow, I was very lucky.

I sat down over there. You had to be very alert and to see. Of course, you had to have luck, too. I wouldn't say that I was smart, because there were smarter people than I was.

But I urged my girlfriend. I said, stay here with me and do what I do. She was-- she had money, so she was afraid, I had no money, so I was not afraid, you know, what to do, what to think with the money.

And I sat down, and at that time, they deported, I think, 3,000 people who were at the-- and 2,000 were sitting on the ground until the evening, and we came for the first concentration camp. They sent us to Plaszow, over there.

My father was still hiding at that time, too. But the policemen-- mostly, the Jewish policemen were butchers, and they all knew my father. So they saw him hiding. There were about 10 people in their hiding place.

They took out everybody, but they left my father. They left him there.

And he was still three weeks until the end-- the cleaning out of the ghetto, the complete liquidation of the ghetto. And we came to Plaszow, the first concentration camp. They took away-- at that time, they took away all our belongings. We had to give everything.

Of course, that watch, I didn't give back. I had some money. It counted to very little, just to buy maybe two bread. That's all that I had.

And we were assigned to work. We were working over there. They were killing a lot of people, because there were some Jews who were working outside by stones.

When we came first to the first concentration camp, we had to carry stones. This was a camp that was built on a cemetery. So all the tombstones were picked up and chopped. Make the largest stones and smaller stones-- and we used to make walks.

Because this was a cemetery, there were no pavements, no walks. We used to carry the stones, and we made the walks. And whoever couldn't carry used to get beaten or shot.

And this was going on about a couple of months. Later, they assigned us to barracks where we went to sew. We were repairing the uniforms from the German soldiers that had holes from the bullets.

There were bullet holes. And of course, from the-- they were all bloody. We used to cut it out, have other-- and we used to mend all the suits that they could use it. Like the underwear from the German soldiers, too-- they were torn.

And we used to work over there in that work. We had one meal a day, a little bit of soap. It was mostly water and rotten potatoes, and one slice of bread a day.

And the worst part was that we had to work two weeks a day, day time-- and I don't remember-- two weeks or one week at night. When we worked at night, we were very hungry. We were tired, because they used to count us in the morning.

We were standing at least an hour and 1/2 in the morning and an hour 1/2 at night. Because the woman-- the German

SS-- they used to count us. Sometimes they made a mistake, and they didn't have the right amount of persons. They used to count again.

Sometimes it took two hours, three hours, too. Because they had-- the whole amount of the Jews that worked was 2,000 people over there. They had-- the amounts-- you know.

So we used to stand over there. And of course, you stood at daytime. You didn't eat much. You stood at night.

And at night, when you went to sleep, sometimes they used to go, come in, and wake you up, too. But at day time, you could still manage. But at night, you were hungry.

You had to work. It was cold, too. It was because this was a wooden make-shift, where we were. And we were sleepy. So what did we do?

We used to go at night to the-- the bathrooms were a latrine. It was a wooden shack, and just the water was there.

There was no heat, nothing. We used to go over there and wash ourselves with cold waters. We should not fall asleep. But it happened many times.

Some used to fall asleep. And the Germans, they used to circle the barracks, and there were no curtains at the windows. They used to look in and saw that somebody was sleeping, and they used to come and shoot.

So the worst part was that sleep-- working at night. And sometimes, we had to sleep during the day. They used to come during the day and take us out for other work, additional work.

So it was so hectic, because you didn't sleep at night. You were working. And you couldn't sleep during the day, because they told you to wash the latrine or something else or do something.

But somehow, we somehow managed. As long as they did not kill, we managed. This was in August. We came-- yeah, and this was-- quite a few times, they came in and they took out people to take from our concentration camp into other concentration camps.

And you had to watch, not to be-- because if you have already in one concentration-- you know what you are doing. You know the people. You were not afraid anymore.

You didn't know what was going to be at another concentration camp. They took out-- one day, they came and took out about 100 women to a munition factory in Poland. It was called Skarzysko.

And then, another of the girls was very sick because of the-- what is this? The chemicals.

Picric acid.

That's right. So I always managed to see, not to be taken. And it was in August, 1943. They took us. We are going out. They took from each place, you know.

We didn't know what was going on. But they are going. Where are we going? Somebody said, I think we are going to the trains.

We didn't know where we are going from the trains. Of course, the Russians were coming closer. So we're taken out from Plaszow. And while we were standing, we saw the trains, and we saw the people loaded to the trains.

And we had to stay in five. And I was moving to the back of the row. There were about 200 girls.

And when I moved to the back, the other four had to move, too, because they count. And so when one is missing, they

would have-- they got a beating from the SS.

They cursed me. What are you doing? Why do you do that? I said, why are you rushing to be the first one?

Let's say, in the back. Let's say, what is going on here? And every time was, I was moving in the back, in the back.

They were so mad at me, the other four. They all survived, the other four. And until we came to the trains, the trains were filled. And we went back to the first-- you know, the concentration camp.

They shipped those to Auschwitz. So at that time, those were the best two months that it was in Plaszow. Because there were quite a few thousand people left, so we had some better-- a little more food.

But it didn't take long. In October, we were loaded, and we were going-- they shipped us to Auschwitz. We came to Bergen-Belsen. They stripped us completely naked. We had to take everything what we had.

Yeah. And that time, not only did I smuggle my watch, I still had pictures of my father, my brothers, my sister-- just the heads, because I couldn't carry too much.

And I still smuggled through with my watch, and I put them in something, and put them in the side. And I put the pictures, but not the watch. The watch, I was holding in my hands.

We were stripped. We were shaved. Not completely-- at that time, it was a little bit lax already. They didn't do-- before that, all the girls were shaved completely.

They used to do mattresses from the hair, that they used to cut it from the people. We were given dresses, schmatters to put on. And there were girls who gave it.

For the tall girls, they get short dresses, and for the short girls, they gave long dresses. And we did have-- shoes were some kind of wooden shoes. By the time we got dressed, we looked at each other, the girls, and you know, we were laughing. How they looked. You know?

What can you do? Some, we couldn't even recognize. And there were a few girls who had beautiful curly hair, blond hair. Those, they used to shave completely, because they didn't want them-- this was a woman.

They didn't want nice good-looking girls to be left. Well, we went to the Birkenau. They put us in the barracks. We were on the one bunk bed. It was not a bed. It was just a wooden plank.

Ten in one-- so we were like sardines. Leg, one on top of the other. Two days later, they took us-- yeah.

We were in Birkenau, I think, two weeks. One day, they took us out, and they were calling about 50 girls. I don't remember.

We're walking, we're walking. And we saw-- from the distance, we saw the crematorium. We were already maybe 50 feet from the crematorium. And somebody came and said, take them back.

We went thrice.

Was this the first time you saw the crematorium?

Beg your pardon?

Was this the first time you saw the crematorium?

Yes. This was the first time, because the crematorium was in Birkenau, not in Auschwitz. This was just next to it. We

saw that, but by that time, we knew all of that, because the others-- we didn't know exactly, but you know-- we first-- you know, we said, funny smell in the air, what it was.

So you know, those who were long over there, we knew already what was it. So twice, I was very lucky. We went back. And two weeks later, they took us up, and they gave us the tattoos.

Those who had the tattoo went to Auschwitz to work. This was good already. We went to Auschwitz. We were already in buildings, in brick buildings.

And we were assigned here, and we got dressed. And another thing-- they used to come over there. We used to go to public showers, and the German used to come and we were naked.

Can you imagine how embarrassed we were? We were all, at that time, very modest girls who were never exposed naked to anybody. Only to a sister, probably, but not to a brother or, you know.

And they used to come in and watch. If there was somebody who had not clean skin or were not nice or had some pimples or whatever, or didn't like the figure or what, they took them out from the showers. It was quite a while--

What did you do with watch? Where did you hide the watch when you did that?

You didn't. You couldn't hide your breasts.

What did you do with the watch?

Oh, the watch? Yeah, I was holding my hands. And when we had to go like this, I put in my mouth.

Or I put it under my arm, and I hid in a small piece of clothes tied up. And then, we came already to Auschwitz, and we started to work. And--

Can we pause at this point? Because we have to change the tape.

OK.

We'll continue with working in Auschwitz when we come back.