

Good afternoon. I'm Bernard Weinstein, director of the Kean College Holocaust Oral Testimonies Project. Assisting me is Jody Frank. We welcome Gertrude Sonnenberg. Mrs. Sonnenberg.

Thank you very much. And my story here which I have to tell you today, it's not a very happy one. And before I begin, I would like to show you some pictures. Here I was a young girl of 19 years. A long time ago.

That's you?

That's me. Supposed to be me, but it is me. And also I have some pictures of my parents. My mother has a stamp behind her picture that was taken by the police, because all Jews had to have a Kennkarte. This was like a passport and they put the stamp on. My father was just a regular picture because my sister has it.

Another thing of the few things which survived with me, two rings. I had a friend in the ghetto in Riga and he was a goldsmith. And he made one ring out of a screw, while the other one was a silver spoon. And it really is miraculous how I got it through all those years without being taking away. I think that was all.

Oh, there is one more picture in--

Yes.

This has to do with my parents, when they were taken away. And they were detained.

Yes.

And they were taken away and before the train was locked up, they had a little piece of paper and gave it to Jewish policemen and through him I got it. And I speak about it later on. I think that's about it.

OK, all right.

I think the easiest way is to start with a little bit of Germany, where I was born, and I tell you about-- I had a very normal childhood like anybody else. My sister and I, we had friends there. We had relatives. And we went to school and we were quite happy. And it all changed when I was about 13 years old.

Was a time where Hitler got known and at that very same moment, we had to go to school like always. But, we were only there physically. We never were allowed to talk. We never were allowed to answer. We just had to be there.

And at the same time, all our friends didn't want to know of us anymore. They didn't even saw us anymore. They looked through us. They didn't talk to us. We didn't exist. The only thing when we exist when they called us, you. And it was a very hard experience because from that little place we went to-- in that little place where we went to school, we were-- you know what everybody was cooking. What was going on in the households and everything and then that was cut off. That was terrible. But it was just the beginning.

We lived in another town where I was born. It was Hausberge an der Porte Westfalica. And it was very nice and pretty and we had a little house there with a garden. And in the garden was a synagogue which my, I think, it was my great-grandfather built. My father-- my whole family had, from generation to generation, had quarries.

We can go back in the family corner to 1700 about. And there was a fire and that destroyed all the papers. But so far about-- I have it. I had a relative who lived, not long ago died. He gave us this chronic.

Excuse me. Your family lived in Hausberge from the 1700?

My father was born there. It's so far it goes back, yeah. But we were not German, of course, later on. And my father's brothers as well as my father fought in World War I and had decorations, but that didn't mean anything, of course.

So through my father's business, we moved from Hausberge to [Place name] That is where I went to school. It's also a very tiny town in the Hessen. It was very anti-Semitic. Anti-Semitic before even Hitler came to power.

It was also at that time when my father had a friend who was a businessman, who asked-- who had also quarries and he asked for some loan for one time. And my father didn't-- wanted to give him but my mother said no but my father went ahead with it When it came the time to pay back, of course, he never paid back. He doesn't have to pay Jews back. And that made us pretty poor.

The Jews couldn't do much of profession anymore, anyhow. And my mother who was a dressmaker before she got married took up that profession again. While my father I tried to look for a job, which was not very successful, because who want to give a Jew something to work with?

A place in [Place name] was too small for business for my mother. And she had a sister who lived in Hannover. And we moved to Hannover and found an apartment there. My mother took a course, a refresher course, and started to really make a living. And we had lots of Jewish customers and it worked out very well.

By that time I was about 13, 14 years. Yeah, that was at the time when I was 14 years old when I didn't have to go to school any longer. I couldn't go further, anyhow, because they only allowed us elementary school, not going further like high school and college and on. That was out.

And we were also very limited with profession, what we could do. You could become a nurse. You could become a cleaning woman. And you could also become a dressmaker. They had no objection to those professions, so called. And my sister became a nurse. She went to Cologne. And there was a Jewish hospital and she learned to become a nurse.

While I went to an apprentice about maybe two, three hours away by train in Dortmund. And I didn't learn much, I must say. Because at that time the apprentice, the kid-- let's say, the people who learned to become a dressmaker.

They had to perform everything but the [INAUDIBLE]. You had to take care of their dog, let him in and out. And you had to go grocery shopping. And if you had time, you had to even heat the oven in the morning. Then they come when they get up, so you had to be there at 7:00. And so when you had time in between they taught you sewing. So after three years I was finished, I barely made my exam, like you have to do in Germany for dressmaking exam.

And I came home and I said, now I go to my mother and I helped her. And she had a couple girls working for her. And when I came there, my mother thought I don't know anything. And I started from the beginning. She said, if you want to become a dressmaker and you want to work with me, then you sit down and become an apprentice with me and I guarantee you will learn it. And I learned it.

In the meantime, the time went on and around 1939, I think, it was when the war was declared with Poland started, September 1st 1939. I remember that because my mother and I, we were working and all of a sudden we heard over the loudspeaker-- that was in Hannover already-- that there was declared Hitler invaded Poland.

And from then on it really starts to go down, down, down. I forgot one to mention, the Kristallnacht. When we lived in that small town, yet. The stores were demolished of those used to had business. There were butcher-- they were two butcher. There were store with material and clothes. And there was a dress-- not a dressmaker, a store sold hats.

And I think altogether were not more than six, seven stores, and they were completely destroyed. And written in this big letters [INAUDIBLE]. And they took that one person who was a dentist to the woods and beat him up merciless. And when he came home-- maybe it was a good thing. But when he came home he decided he's going and leave Germany. And he left pretty soon.

He was just married and had two small children and he's still living. I met him in America again and we became friendly again. And he's still living in Florida now. And tonight we will speak to each other. He's high in the 80s. He must be almost 90.

What happened to the synagogue that your grandfather built?

That was at that time when we were children was not occupied anymore. It was just standing there and it was a charming little place. It was all surrounded with ivy and the benches were in and the Torah were in and my sister and I we used to play with it.

After the war 1980, we went back to Germany for the first time. And we were invited from the city of Hannover who wanted to show their goodwill and we were guests of the city for two weeks. And we refused for at least-- we moved already 12, 13 years and we never went. We refused. And I'm not going back.

But we went back because everybody said, you're foolish. They did it I already. There was in Berlin, they did the same thing. And they said, you're foolish not to go. It's coming to you. So we finally went. And I visit that place where I was born. Where the little synagogue stand and it wasn't there anymore.

And when I asked-- my sister gave me a push and said, well, just ask for it. Can't you speak? It was naturally vandalism. It completely disappeared. It was a strange feeling to come back and go to the same house where we lived so long.

That my parents and my father's sisters and brothers, they own that house and they had to sell it. And at first we just used-- we couldn't have the house so they needed, and they made a bank out of it first. And when we came back, I just wanted to see what it looks like. And I also wanted to have my birth certificate.

And so I went into house and said, my name is Gertrude Sonnenberg. [SPEAKING GERMAN]. My sister, my husband, we come from America. And I would like to get my birth certificate it's possible. How much does it cost? \$2. 2 marks or whatever. Fine, I want two.

And I said by the way, is there somebody here who is a little bit older than you. I used to live in this house. And maybe there's somebody we still know. And so they said that the gentleman who was about middle age is not here today, but we will arrange it.

And I said, can we go to the garden? That house was also created that when you go from the bedroom out, there was like a bridge. You go right into the garden from the bedroom out. And that was-- everything was the same and I picked up some flowers. It was an unbelievable feeling.

And then we went from there, we went to the cemetery. There is a Jewish cemetery. And we walked there and it was not destroyed. I think it's one shot by on one gravestone, but everything else was the way it was. And it was very well taken care of.

And they had a big sign on it that this is a monument. And I mean, a landmark, more or less, and you could go in and you can go through from there to the other cemeteries and everything. It was incredible. And it's about 90% for the whole cemetery was always the name of Michelsohn. Of course, we lived a long-- from generation to generation.

How large a family did you have?

Well, my father had two sisters, one brother. My mother had, I think, six or seven-- six brothers and a sister, I think. And then we had lots of cousins. And oh, I would think all together must be probably in the 20s or so.

So we were always surrounded with family and we were always also very close, especially with my father's sisters and the one brother, and with my mother's sister we are very close. We spent our vacation-- when we lived in [Place name] we spend our vacation in Hausberge. Our relatives expected us and it was a lovely time.

But I could talk about it forever. But, no. What you really want to know is about the concentration camp. I think when the war was declared, not long after that we were all called to the police and we had to get this picture taken with a Kennkarte. It is a passport.

And from now on when you had to buy something, want to shop, you had to show that. Because since the war started, the rations in Germany were not generous anymore. You couldn't get as much coffee as you want, as much tea as you want. It was rationed.

And we had to wait with our Kennkarte and everybody was done-- out of the store. And then we could buy. But you could not have certain items like butter. You couldn't have-- I don't think you could have coffee either. All which things which are, more or less, luxury item during the war was not for us, only the bare necessities.

Then came the time where you had to walk in the street because you've got a Jewish star. It's a bit bright yellow star written Jude in German on it, but like Hebrew symbols, more or less. And they told you exactly how high, from the shoulder down on the left side. The first point of the star has to sit-- and we had to buy it. The first month was free and rest you had to buy it. It wasn't expensive but-- they had to make a couple of dollars on us, I guess.

And I remember then when my mother and I had it sewn on and we went out, it was a terrible feeling to be mocked. It's not as a Jude. You will just be mocked. And it was apparently not sewn exactly as it should because somebody come from the other side, some Christian people and they said, look at them. Look at those Jews there. That doesn't sit the right way, the star.

So when we went home we start measuring and wasn't far off but it wasn't exactly where it should have sit. That was-- you didn't feel like going out anymore. But we were allowed. We had a curfew. We were allowed in summer until 8 o'clock. And in winter we had to be home at 7:00. The times get worse.

Oh, and then another thing. When you went to the trolley car, or bus. Even if either, both was empty and nobody was in, we had to stand in the back. You could not sit. When you where in the street walking, you could not go on the sidewalk. You had to walk in the gutter. This were all the outer signs of being a Jew.

We had still quite some culture. We had the Jewish Kulturbund. That mean were Jewish-- where activities and performance and music it was held-- first it was held in the synagogue-- in the old synagogue before they were burned done. The old synagogue, they were not touched. The new one was burned down.

And there the activities took place. And we even had gym. We had parallel bars and horse and everything. We had somebody, a friend which I had, who is still living in Sweden. He was a teacher and we went once a week there.

Otherwise, activity-- yeah, we could go. There was a family who lived right in town in Hannover. And they had a big apartment. And they emptied it out and they had activities there. We met there on Friday nights, Saturday nights. We danced. Somebody played a record player and we danced and you could buy coffee.

And you were sitting like you always do in Europe. You could sit for hours over a cup of coffee with a little piece of cake. That is the way they do it. And even if you go back today, you can sit that long there.

And that is the way we met also. When that was forbidden later on, we did it at home. We met young people. We met at everybody's home. We took turns and with the record player and we played and we talked. It was our only entertainment. And then the Kulturbund had to stop too. There was nothing anymore.

And that went on for a few years until one day-- oh, then the war. It started to show-- the bombs were coming down. I think it was the English who started to come over Germany, if I'm not mistaken. And we had to sit in the cellar, of course.

Before that I went to Munich and from there I -- up to Bavaria because we had some relatives there. And I spent a lovely time there. And one day I got a call from the Jewish organization in Munich to come home, so I said, what happened? They said nothing bad but we wanted you to come home.

Oh, I forgot to mention that-- before I continue this. There came a time where nobody could live in a house or apartment

anymore. And you had to go to some place like Jewish school. They closed the school and took all the benches out and you lived there with hundreds of people.

And also that the synagogue which-- where we had all the activities. That was for the Jews. You had to-- they all had to give up their houses and apartments and they lived together probably to get us all together faster instead of going from house to house. And it was very hard. You could only take very little with you already.

So when I came. When I heard from Munich that I have to come home, my parents and I, we lived already in the building in the school. And we lived downstairs and had a big room with two beds and a couch. And that pretty much-- and a closet and that was about it. The rest was just left in the apartment where we lived and we had no access to go there.

The four of you were together during this time?

My sister was in Cologne. But she came later on when it was about time that we thought we will probably transport-- transported somewhere. She asked to come for a visit. You had to go to the police to get permission to travel. And you could not travel without permission. So my sister got the permission and she came and she never went back. She went to-- in Hannover to a Jewish hospital there. And a relative of my parent's was the chief doctor there and it was no problem to get in, of course. And then she stayed with us, of course, until we all came away together.

What happened to your house when you left it? Was it occupied by someone else?

In Hausberge where we had owned our house. There the town took over. They made a bank out of it. And then later on when we came back after so many years in 1980, it was actually like an office. You could go apply for a marriage license and front of town. It's like a city hall. But all those places. So if you want to go for a divorce and have to go there or something, or whatever it was.

And it wasn't unchanged. They made the stairs wider but the rooms were untouched. They made it more modern because it was an old house already. But was a strange feeling. Yeah. So anyhow Where was I?

You were in these rooms with your parents in this place where--

In a temple.

Oh, yeah. That's right. So when I finally traveled through the night and arrived in the next morning and I went home to Hannover and I went to the house where-- to the school there-- and go to that room where we lived. And nobody was there of my parents. Somebody else was there and they didn't even know my parents.

So I got a little bit panic stricken. and I went from room to room. Until I came up on the attic. And there was a little tiny weensy little room and there were my parents. The reason was, they brought more people in this school building. So in order that we could be together, they put us all up in the attic and we didn't have anybody else to share with.

This was an attic.

That was an attic already. And then the bombs are falling and we had to get down and then we were all in the basement. And the SS came around and nobody should escape. Nobody can escape if the bombs are falling down, believe me. So they could saved the trouble.

Some people were very smart thinking by going to other countries. Tried in good time to get the visa and to get out of the country. Some people-- and I have to include my father too-- felt that we were more Germans than Judes. And felt well for one, this may blow over. Nobody will throw us out.

And unfortunate by the time we saw the light, it was too late. I know we go to Stuttgart where the consulate was. And the quota was so high, there was no way. And then you needed also money. Some people went illegal out. Many to

Sweden. I don't know. Maybe Argentina, I don't know. Many countries where they could find. Well, we couldn't. We didn't have the money.

And the only other thing was I wanted to go to England. I figured that if I go there as a maid-- many people did it. And there's a chance you can get your family also out. So I applied for that. And the woman who was in charge had a sister and she lived in the country.

And she said, well, Gertrude. I can't send you there. You don't understand anything from house cleaning yet. You're much too young for that but you have to learn it. And I send you to my sister. She will teach you. Which was the end of that.

She wanted probably that her sister get her house cleaned. It was very filthy. She couldn't work hard. She wasn't feeling well and so on. And here I was. And maybe, just maybe, I lost the chance that I could have gotten out and maybe could have gotten my family out. But it is just a maybe.

So instead we were collected in Hannover. There was a Jewish garden [INAUDIBLE]. A Jewish school for teaching gardening and sewing and housework for young kids who want to go to Israel to the kibbutz and so on. That was preparation and they went in order to schools there. Yeah, there they could go to school in the Jewish school.

So they emptied that out. And all those people who were living in the synagogues and in the schools and so on were collected with the police station-- by the police, with a police wagon, cart. Let's call it here. And we were picked up alphabetically and we were brought to that school. It was Hannover [INAUDIBLE], and we were told we should take a knapsack with [INAUDIBLE] of clothes and that's it.

When our time came, they picked us up. Before they picked us up-- my father had a business friend in Hausberge, where we have come from. And all of a sudden he appeared. And up to this day, I don't know how he managed that. Because the whole school was so surrounded by SS that nobody could come in or out.

And he was there. He said, do you have anything what you cannot take along and what is precious to you? I take it and you will get it back when you survive. I gave the little what's there. Very little jewelry, because they picked everything up.

They came just knocking on the doors, the SS, collecting jewelries. Coming on that-- you have radios. Another time they came you have liquor. Any time that the door-- there was a knock on the door, you got already scared.

So there wasn't so much left. And what was left was in the school building, before in the apartment where you lived, or in the house. So you really had only 100 pounds what they allowed you, more or less. And so he gave it whatever we had a few spoons, a few tablecloths. And believe it or not, we got it back after we were rescued.

Unfortunately little later he died. But he sent it back to us. He sent it-- our names, we are all mentioned in the Jewish papers, the Aufbau. And the people got that to see who survived or not and he found our name and he sent it. That was a decent Christian person. There were a couple among them.

Unfortunately, I made a big mistake. I also had-- my mother had a little locket and I always admired it. And I put it on and the lock was not tight and I lost it. And I never forgave myself. I should have brought it to the jeweler and should have done. But I couldn't wait to wear it and unfortunate that was what happened. But we lost more than that.

So then when we came to that-- they called it auf-- what did the call it? I forgot the name. It will come to me later. Anyhow, we were collected. 1,000 Jews 1,000 ones from Hannover. Each transport would goes out with 1,000 people. And we came to that place and we stood there all night in line because they had to check us out, if we had some jewelry. The women in one section and the men to the other section. And we had to go to the bathroom and there they undressed us and they checked all over, under your arms, under your legs, under your-- they went in everywhere where they could find jewelry.

And when you were through that night, you thought the end was there already, then they say you can go in that room and can lie down. It was just carpet-- not carpet, straw. Was laying on the floor and lay where you want to. And they gave you something to eat. That took about three days until we are all through, 1,000 people.

Then again came the police and said, we're going on the train-- we bring you to the train. Where to, naturally. We were not been told. And I must say, we were one of the few lucky transports who are sitting in a regular train, not in a freight train. So there were eight people in one [INAUDIBLE]. Yeah.

Compartment?

Compartment, yeah. And we got something to eat. They gave us some bread and some cold cuts and other-- I think some water we had in a container as least. And where's our knapsack? Oh, that's already sent out. You will get it wherever you arrive.

Naturally we never saw it again. We really had only what we had on our body. That was all. So we traveled for three days and three nights. And the next first morning we got out-- two days-- three days, two nights, I think. And we had even heat in the train. We had a light in the train. They even stopped and got us water couple time on the trip, so we thought we had it better. It was good.

Do you have any idea why they did that?

No. I have no idea?

Just random.

Because the most other transport came just in the freight train. So when we arrived, naturally, they took the-- returned the locomotive, dispatched it. And we had no heat, no light, and nothing. And it was bitter cold. We were cold and we don't know where we where, of course.

And the next morning, the SS came. And Juden raus. Hurry, hurry, hurry. And we came out and we stood there. And then there was a tall officer. Turned out to be Langer was his name. I think he committed suicide later on. I think I read it in some books.

If there's anybody who is sick and cannot walk, because we have a long, long walk. And it was bitter cold, it was freezing, it was snow. And he said, you are in Skirotava. That is a suburb of Riga. That's all he said.

My mother had terrible asthma and I told her, why don't you go in the bus? Then you don't have to walk. Who knows where we'll be. She said, no. I'm walking with you all. And that was a blessing because those bus were gassed. They never arrived together.

So we walked for about an hour and a half. And all over was the SS. And they pushed you with the gun if you didn't go fast enough. And if you could manage anymore, they shot. And that was all. But we didn't know at that times the Latvian SS-- they were worse that the German SS. That is incredible. Most of the actions were done by the Latvian SS. The German told them what to do and they are only too willing to do it.

And finally after that long time, we matched in to the-- what to call-- ghetto. There was a cemetery right in the beginning and we marched. And all of a sudden the SS man said stop. There were a wall of maybe four or five houses, something like that. He said, go in. So we went in. 1,000 and one of us. Minus some people who went on the bus and which were killed already on the way because they couldn't walk anymore.

And it was incredible the house were so dilapidated and on the table were food. Plates were filled fill. And spoons and knife still in there and stuck in the food, as if some people would have been there before and they were just forced to get out the way they were.

And that was really what happened that we found out later on. They just killed the last Jews there and there we come. So that was our only food which we had. And on the walls, there was still clothes hanging. But they couldn't take along. They say must have left right from lunch or dinner table.

And now find a bed. That was another problem. There were-- well it's the one bedroom or two bedrooms the most. And the rest was the kitchen and the, of course, living room. But was left unfurnished, and there we slept.

So you were billeted in homes that had belonged to Latvian Jews.

That's exactly. And the few Latvian Jews who were not killed. I think there was a group of about 300 Jews. Latvian Jews men. There was also a group of a handful of women. But they were separated. They could not come together. Wait a minute. [INAUDIBLE].

You were looking for a bed.

Yeah, we're looking for a bed. My sister and I, we slept-- my sister slept later on in the hospital as a nurse. But I slept on the floor. All the younger generation like we were at that time, between 19, and 23 maybe, all the young people. We slept on the floor.

Couple people slept together in one bed. And I know my parents-- there was a door which was out of the hinges and there were two chairs. And they put the door on the chair and that's where my parents slept on. And what was there on blankets were Jews, Who didn't get in fast enough didn't have a blanket.

So there we were sitting and what will happen to us? Sitting and sitting. And the night came and nothing happened. And then the next morning, there was like an Appell. They let us come out and told us, that this is where we will live. This is where we were sent to work and this is where we get food and they will get clothes.

Well, we -- ask where's the clothes which we took along. Supposed to be there. Well, we won't get that. From now on, the clothes will be distributed. You can bring once a week your dirty laundry and in exchange we give you clean laundry.

So the ghetto was really a city in itself. They had Jewish police was chosen. The Kommandant [Personal name] [SPEAKING GERMAN] lager elder we called it. That the a man who has, a Jew the say, over everything. And what he said, was the Bible. That had to be followed.

They built a shed where clothes were. Where you could exchange your clothes. Then there was a room where you could go once a week to collect your food. You got a little bit sugar, salt, potatoes which were frozen of course. But it taste terrible but we had at least something.

I think each one got five pound for a month which is nothing, of course. And we got fish heads and fish eyes. That was our main food. And how do you cook with it? So finally we were very inventive. We found a grinder where you grind meat with. And with the fish eyes and the head we'll grind it. A little bit pepper, a little bit salt. put a little bit water in the pan and then you fried it or baked it.

Now where did you get the wood from? The wood you just took the chair and destroyed it and you sat in the beginning. Later on when we went on Kommandos, we could bring wood that was one thing where we are not hanged for is when you brought wood into the ghetto. But we could not afford to have that oven lit because it was too little wood what you could carry. Sometimes you walk two hours to Kommando.

So somebody else was very inventive again and built a little stove oven. I don't think it was much bigger than that book. Maybe so much bigger and maybe so high. And it is all miniature. Like little miniature door and miniature rings which you'll lift it up and you'll cut the wood in tiny little pieces and put it in. And put the rings on again and lit it up and that was your heat and that was your rate of cooking.

It cost you a couple ration of potatoes or whatever the men wanted for it. But that's the only way that we could have some warm water, because otherwise we couldn't even wash. So you learn that if you just-- or even for a slice of bread, because you get a loaf of bread in a week and didn't [INAUDIBLE] was all what you had.

Then started about to going on Kommandos. The Kommando meant in the mornings you had to show up a certain collection point and there was a SS. And that I need, let's say for instance, 50 men for this and this Kommando, and they counted 50 people and go with them.

So that's what we had to do. We marched usually an hour, hour and a half. Sometimes two hour. When it was longer, they had an open truck where they put us on and we were standing, of course. And it was cold and we were not dressed properly because we didn't have anything. And the little bit-- what we found in the houses from the [INAUDIBLE] we used. We had to sell it. I mean, sell it-- we called it [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

This was declared if they found out that when you came back and they spot checked that you had even as much as a button, you'll be hanged. But the time was so bad. The hunger was so great. You just had to do it.

Were many people willing to run the risk?

The whole ghetto. Anybody who could go on an outside Kommando had to take something with me. I did it. Once or twice, I couldn't do it. I was so afraid. For a little handkerchief, I got a little bit butter. And where do you hide it? On your stomach.

And thank god it was cold outside because it was below 30, 40 degrees. And it frozen on you too. You had nothing, no warm clothes. But otherwise, it would just come down and you would have been caught and that's it. You were hanged. And then you'll be hanged.

If the Kommando came back at night from work, tired, with a little piece of wood then you were hanged. It had to go to that collection point and there was a gallow. And there the people were hanged. And we were forced to look up and look at them for at least a half hour before we could go home. This a warning. When we do that it will be the same fate.

They made you stand in a formation and--

Yeah, we had to stand in the way we came. And we have to look up. And they made sure that we look up and they're hanging there. And many times I see people which I know from the same group. And you have-- know them from the same town and everything and there they were hanging. So it was not a picnic.

My parents-- my mother worked in a factory building inside. So that the older people stayed inside who are not able to work-- go to work everyday in all kind of weather. There were good Kommanders and bad Kommanders. Inside my mother worked in a factory sewing, preparing-- what do you call it-- uniforms from the front.

My father had to clean the-- oh, once he tried to get some food and we were so desperate. And he made a mistake. He didn't think right at that time. Went to Latvian SS guy who was surrounding the ghetto. There were hundreds of them and offered him something. Naturally he was reported.

And only because my sister worked in the hospital and know a doctor who persuaded the SS-- that Latvian SS someway, I don't know how. He was not shot. But he had to go and clean the toilet and there was only one toilet for the whole house and he and another guy had to clean it for the rest of his days.

And believe me. It would run over, constantly. It's was no pleasure. And you had no rubber gloves or nothing. I mean, you were down to the nitty gritty.

And my sister worked in the hospital. And I went on the outside Kommando. Usually you had to be there by 5:00 6:00 in the morning with a slice of bread. And we were shoveling snow-- I would say out of 12 months of the year, at least five months there was snow on the ground. It's bitter cold.

And sometimes it was so frozen that even the locomotives with the soldiers who go to the front, couldn't go anywhere. They were stuck. And who got to get them loose? We. We used to take this ice pick and had to get the train loose. That took days and days and days. They were sitting nice in the rooms.

What kind of sleeping quarters did you have?

We were still in the houses.

You came back at night.

Huh?

You came back at night.

Yes, we came back at night. And eventually the houses emptied out because there was one execution after another. They need new Kommandos. They lied constantly. For instance they said there's a Kommando Dunamunde. That is a fish factory. Who wants to work in fish factory? You can volunteer. It's beautiful.

Then well something to eat. Fish factory. Sounds great. You put sardines in the cans. Oh, so many went. I think, how many? I think I have it somewhere in the book. Maybe I have it here. Dunamunde. It was called Dunamunde. It must be here somewhere.

Oh, on the 30th of March to first of April 1942. 2000 people-- most of them volunteered. That Kommando never ever existed. They were just sent to the-- they called it, [SPEAKING GERMAN], through the wood. Where they had to dig their own graves and then take their clothes off and they'll be shot from the back. That was the Kommando.

So any Kommando where you went to, it was a lie. And that was the fish factory.

How did you find out that these things happened?

Because we had Jewish police. Our ghetto was a city, like a city, we have policemen, we have stores. I mean, stores where you get your food every week and you stood in line. There was a hospital when we were sick. And there were Jewish policemen chosen and they had to go with the transports and then they came back, they told you.

And sometimes they never came back because they were right away killed with it. They depend on the Kommando. There was Kommando. It was called [INAUDIBLE]. That must have been awful.

The first time that was all the volunteer. And I know I had a friend I know him from Hannover and he lived in the same building with us and his parents lived in the same building with us. And he said, you know Gertrude, I go. Then I can build barracks and we will get a decent room to live, your parents and my parents. I said to him, don't go. I have a feeling.

Something told me always never volunteer. What happens, happens. But don't volunteer. But he felt different and he never came back. And when he saw the light, he escaped from work from the truck and they shot him. And that was [INAUDIBLE]. And it says here also how many people were shot at with [? food. ?] And one day, 14 men were shot and I bet he was among those.

Another tragic thing happened was Latvian Jewish police. They were some special elite people, tall and healthy and young. They had everything going for him. They spoke Latvian. They even could speak to the Latish people. They had no problems. They got things. They got food how and they found way where they could always somehow escape. They came always back and brought food along and so on. And many benefited from them.

And one day it was so bad they decided that they will make an uproar. They will not take it any longer. And that was on

the 30th of October, November? Yeah, 30th of October 1942, all 41 of these people-- somebody must've given the secret away. I don't know how.

They built in the big stove, in the regular stove, they took the rings out and built a walk that came underneath the ghetto out into town. And they brought all the weapons in. They wanted to kill the SS and cause an uproar. And that was found out. So they had to come and they had to run in the ghetto. And then while they're running, they shot all the 41 men like that.

We have to pause for a few minutes.

Is that one hour already?

Yeah.

Good.