

Good afternoon. My name is Bernard Weinstein. I'm the director of the Kean College Oral Testimonies Project on the Holocaust. We are affiliated with the Holocaust Resource Center at Kean College and with the Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies at the Sterling Library of Yale University.

Sharing the interview with me is Phyllis Ziman Tobin, New York affiliate of the Yale project, and assistant project coordinator at Kean. We are privileged to welcome Margie Appel, a survivor presently living in Springfield, who has generously volunteered to give testimony about her experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust. ,

Welcome Mrs. Appel. I'd like to begin by asking you to tell us a little bit about your life in the town where you grew up before the Holocaust.

I grew up in Czechoslovakia in Klečany. It was a nice life, quiet life. We were a family of nine children, two girls and seven boys, and mother and father, and grandfather of 94. And it was very nice. We got along very nicely with all of our neighbors, the Gentile neighbors. We had no problems. The kids used to sometimes say, oh, you're a Jew. So we used to yell back, so you Christian, you know. But was no problems. And we went to Czech school. Everything was all right.

How important was being Jewish?

Very important. But as a Jew, we were not that religious, is more religious than any Jew we knew, you know. They were so religious there, that unbelievable. And we liked it. We didn't know any other way. And everybody got along very nicely. And it was nice.

Were you the youngest?

No, after me was a boy that I have on this picture. He was born in 1930. I was born in 1928. And he went-- he didn't come home. And what more can I say?

What did your father do?

My father was in the cattle business. He dealt. He was-- we weren't rich, we weren't poor, middle class people. We lived nicely. And nobody knew any better and everybody was happy.

Was it a fairly small town?

Yeah, I would say about 45 families, Jewish families, but a lot of children.

Yeah.

And everybody got along very nicely. And my mother had there a few sisters and a brother. And my father had also family.

In the same town.

In the same town. We always stuck together.

At what point did you sense that you were in danger?

At what point, in 1941 we heard rumors, things are happening in Poland and here and there. We heard things. They wouldn't talk in front of us, my parents, but I heard my father with a lot of men, group of men. And I always snuck in somehow. And I heard that he said that things are not good.

And then first, they took away our men, the young fellas. That was forced labor. They used to build tracks for the train

and ditches. And so they got-- they first took the men. All the men and they left the youngsters home with the mother and father.

So the occupation, the German occupation, was already there in the country at the time these things were happening?

Well, it was Hungary came in.

The Hungarians.

The Hungarians came in and that's when the trouble started. Around 1938, '39 it's already started-- you dirty Jew, you this and that. But the first war, my father was in the first war. That was Hungary.

Show us the picture.

That was Hungary then. And they were very nice.

Yeah.

Can we move in on the picture?

Yeah.

In fact--

[INAUDIBLE] that camera. OK, good. You can talk about your father.

Yeah, in fact, that was-- when they took us away, Passover, a couple of days before, a gendarme was looking for my father. So everybody was already frozen. Oh, they're going to take us away or things like that.

You have a picture of your father. Would you like to hold it up to the camera?

Yeah, I'm holding-- is this all right?

Excellent, excellent.

OK.

Yeah.

And he was in World War I. And this gendarme came to look for my father in 1944, right after the Passover-- I mean in Passover. The next day, they took us away. Put it down?

Yes, thank you.

And what happened was this guy comes over to my father. We were all shaking in the boots. We got scared that they want us, they want to take us away. And it was our friend that he was in the hospital with in the First World War. And they grabbed, and they hugged. And he sat down to eat with us. They were a different type of Hungarians.

Yes.

And then, this war, they were no good. So this is what happened after. And what do you want me to say? I don't know.

OK, so that about 1938 then is when the Hungarians took over.

The Hungarians, yeah.

And that's when you began feeling uncomfortable.

Very uncomfortable.

Do you remember any particular incidents?

I remember first they were in the cities. And we were cut off, the small towns. We couldn't go to the city. Because there was Hungary, we were Czech. And one day we look out the window, and there was churches on the hill, and I see people rolling down, soldiers are rolling down. And they're shooting. So we closed the windows and the shutters.

And there was the Czech soldiers, were running away. And they were conquering, the Hungarians were coming in. And my brothers got the wagon ready. [INAUDIBLE] father and got the wagon ready and loaded them, the wounded people on the carriages, on the wagons. And we were so afraid. If they catch them, they'll kill them.

So they made it to another town, to Uzhhorod, Ungvár in Jewish, we used to call it. And that's where he came home safe. But they took him to the hospital there. Because the further-- they came in here, then a few days later there. And that's how it was. So they occupied us.

So the Gentile people were happy with food, with this. They remembered this Hungary from way before. And with the flags, and it was such excitement, but none of the Jews did. Because they already felt-- they heard things about this regime. And they felt already it's not the same.

So the Jews were the only group that they mistreated or the only group that they treated differently?

Right. And then they started to take us out of school. They stopped us from going to school.

When did you have to stop school?

I was sixth grade, they took us out from school. First, we had to learn Russia, Ukrainian, and then the Jewish kids were not allowed to go to school at all. And that's how the trouble started.

Did your education continue?

No, no, not at all. To this day, I had children, I couldn't go to school after.

What did you do then?

Well, then we were home, helping our mother. Because all the big boys were out. They were taken away. My younger boys, they also-- you saw the picture, they were in forced labor.

Show us this picture.

Yeah.

We have another photograph that will be seen now, as soon as we get that on the camera.

Is this OK?

No, they're going to focus it. You just keep it that way.

There is two of my brothers there too.

I'll point to them.

You point.

Yes, because I know.

Right here.

That's good.

Let me see the other one.

I'll point. You hold it up and I'll point.

Hold it up in front of your face.

As soon as I see it on camera, I shall.

OK, just hold it up, like that. A little higher, a little higher. OK. Can we zoom in now? In your lap, in your lap, OK.

This photograph, it was taken in what year?

This, I don't even know.

About?

In 1941, something, like-- no, maybe 1942 or '43. Because that's when they started taking those kids.

But you were still at home at that time.

Yes. We were home until 1944.

Here's a brother and there's a brother.

The younger kids.

Yes.

And then they have another group of the older kids.

Thank you.

Thanks.

So we kids have to help our parents out, to help them with the housework and so many people. And this was the story.

So from 1938 to 1942, you were at home?

Yeah.

Those four years you were at home, did things get increasingly difficult for you?

Very, yes. We always shivered, always shivered. The children didn't know that much, but we could sense it. My father used to go around sad. My mother was very-- my mother was always a pessimist. She saw what she saw. My father

always thought the good side. I am also like that. I always look on the bright side.

And she always said, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. It's not right. I know there is problems and there is trouble. They're taking away here people in Poland. They're burning and killing people. And I'm afraid it will come to us. And we were always very tense and very scared all the time.

Did these brothers in the camp, of the photograph you just showed, come home?

No.

Or they stayed in the camp?

No, one of my brothers came with us to Auschwitz, the little one. And for the life of me, for many years, I didn't know why-- if my father went to the gas chamber, how come he came running in Auschwitz to my mother and said, ma, they send me to you. And I couldn't figure it out, only a few years ago why.

Because the mothers went with the children and the fathers went by themselves. But I couldn't figure it out. It took me years to figure out what happened. I didn't want to think about it. And then it always came, it always was there.

So he went. And the other three, I saw in Bergen-Belsen before occupation-- liberation, three weeks before. I came from another camp, from Essen. It was already--

Let's work backwards now.

Yeah, OK.

At 1945-- '44, where were the members of your family? When you were still at home?

My three brothers, one we heard already home was captured by the Russians. And the others were-- one was still in Hungary and one was by the Russian front, with the Germans or Hungarians working in the labor. And one of my brothers heard that he was sent-- going to be sent out. So one night, he took a friend of his and he came home. He came all the way to Munkács, to the city.

And on the bridge he was caught. They gave him life sentence. I never saw a jail, but that time I went to see him. And there was a little window. And poor guy was sitting there. And they kept him for a few weeks. Then they shipped him back to his group.

And it was lucky that they appealed the case to Horthy, the president of Hungary. And he, how should I say, he gave him amnesty. So they sent them to the Russian front. He came home. He came home. They were sending him back to Germany in the end.

And he started to tie his shoes. He knew he was home and the Russians are close by. He started to tie his shoes. And he fell into the ditch. And he hid there for days until he ran into a barn. And the chickens and the cows started to scream. And the man, the goy came out. And this goy happened-- Gentile-- happened to know him. Because my father dealt with him.

And he saw this was the end already, the Russians are soon here. So he let him live. But he was afraid for days to get out so they wouldn't shoot him. Because the only Jew in town, who needs him? So this was this case. And there is many, many things.

But you, yourself, now, can we trace your experiences personally?

Yes, yes.

From '44, I guess you stayed at home till '44.

Until 1944. And then a day after Passover, my mother was baking bread, early morning, which all the women were baking. Because we didn't have bread. But the house was so sad. Everybody knew it was just a matter of days. Because we heard this town is going, and this town is going, and this town is going.

When you say going, what did you know? What did the mean to you?

We knew that they're gathering them together. They're gathering around the Jews.

And what else did you know?

And that's all we knew.

Just gathering.

Yeah. We knew it was no good. They're getting the Jews together. And they're shipping them, for work, for this, for that, but it's not a good sign. We knew what happened in Poland. And what happened was we got up a day after Pesach. And the bread is still in the oven. And we take a look on the street. The street is like now there. And my uncle, my mother's brother, lived far away. But I could see across there going already the people, with the bundles on their shoulders.

And we started to scream, they are here. They're taking everybody away. And what I wanted to tell you, there was a sheriff, of small time sheriff in town. His son was a friend of my brother's. And he liked me. I was about 15, not even 15. And he liked me for years. I thought he was coming to my brother. They're close friends.

His father was the sheriff. He came over to the gate. I'll never forget that-- to the fence. And called over my father. And he said, Jonah, I want you to give Malka and Binjamin to me. I'm going to hide them. And I'll never forget what my father said. He said, oh, no, what will be. It wasn't so smart. But I don't know if I would have gone. I never was away from my parents, and they--

Do you think he meant to do it?

Yes, he meant it. He was a good man.

Yeah.

The son cried. He cried. His tears were coming down. I want they should stay. I want they should stay. So the father came over to beg us. And my father answered. His answer was oh, no. He says, what will be with the rest of the family will be with them.

So what was important to him was that you not be separated--

No.

--from each other.

Always together. And this is what happened. So he left us, that sheriff. They gathered together the whole day people. And they left us to the end. Thanks to him, too, my mother had the chance to bake the bread, and to finish, and to pack. And we were the last one to be picked up to go to the temple, in the yard. The temple was full so they packed us in the yard.

And we came as children there. I mean, everybody, the whole town, the Jewish people. Some of them had measles and they were quarantined. So they left them, but they came afterwards. And it was terrible there.

So also, he arranged-- my mother was sickly. And he arranged, and my father arranged that when we went from the town to Munkács, to the city, to the ghetto-- that was a ghetto. It was a brick factory. And they emptied the whole attic. It's a big, big one. The whole attic, and all of us had a little space there. So he arranged we should go-- my mother and I should go on the wagon and not to walk, this man. There wasn't too many, I could tell you.

So we came there it was horrible. They were beating and chasing. And they gave us a spot, this much for every family. And my mother had velvet bedspreads that was only for Yontif And that time, she said to hell with everything. I don't think we'll have a Yontif anymore. I said, ma, what are you talking about. And she started to use the bedspreads. Because it had to be neat and clean. And there was inspections.

Can you describe your living space, where you lived, the place itself?

Over there?

Yes, in Munkács.

It was a big attic, a big, big attic. And there we had-- everybody had a space, not divided or anything. It just, this is yours, this is mine.

With beds.

No, on the floor. But there was no fights. Everybody knew that-- it was like maybe this part for one family. But no, it was not divided at all. So we slept there. We were there for about four weeks. I had braids up to here. And my mother liked them. I hated them because whenever they had to comb that out, I screamed, or washed, but there was no choice there. There was no water, no nothing.

So she took me one day and we cut our hair. First the men, they had to cut off their beard. So nobody recognized the men. So my mother says, it's time to cut off your braids, as much as I hate to do that.

I came in, by the lake, there was a Hungarian soldier. There wasn't too many, but he was a little humane. And he says, I can't believe it. What are you doing? Aren't you sick to cut this off? Because they were beautiful. You take them apart, they're wavy. And she said, I have no choice. I have to cut. She cried so much. And she cut my hair off.

And the next day, my brother, one of my brothers in the other pictures, he was late, a few minutes. There was a curfew. He was late a few minutes. And don't ask what happened. They waited for the second, for a few. They caught every night a few guys, young fellas, to have something to do. And they tortured them. It was raining and pouring. And they tortured him.

And we knew it must have been him because he didn't arrive to the space. And they were screaming. And then they dragged them through the mud for hours and hours. Finally, he came up. He was half dead.

The next day I went with my mother also to wash the clothes. And we cried, and cried, and cried. One day my mother went in line to stay for water. I couldn't take it. My sister was older, but somehow, I was the one always there. I couldn't take it. I stood in the line.

And I said, ma, you sit down. And that soldier, the same soldier, saw me. And he said, you go [GERMAN]. You go on in the front. You know, you could find one in a million like that. So I got the water.

So it took a while that, we stayed there about four weeks. But I wanted to tell you about my grandfather. I almost missed that.

Yes.

At 94, when they came to gather us, he said, I'm not going. I lived my life. 94, I stay in my bed and they would shoot me right here. I know it's no good. I'm not going no place. I want to die in my bed. At last, they dragged him out in the underpants. And they beat him. And they took him out. And he got dressed. And he came with us.

And he was living with you in the--

Yeah.

In this area, how many of your family were there? Your grandfather and your parents?

And my--

And your sister.

My sister and me. And we were left-- all the boys were in--

So, there were no boys there?

Yeah, it was two-- four.

Four boys.

Five.

Five boys were left home.

The younger ones.

Because they were the younger ones. So they wanted to run away. But where to? So they beat them and they hurt them. you know, and that still hurts so much when I remember that. It's impossible to bear it sometimes. Not so much-- if they would hit me, I wouldn't mind, but to hit my brothers for no reason. He had a few cents in his pocket, they beat him up. He forgot he had to empty his pocket to give them the money, and the jewelry, and all that.

So in the ghetto-- when they gathered us in the temple-- I forgot to mention that my mother had a little jewelry, very little, earrings, and my sister's watch, and this. So there was one homosexual in town. I didn't know what it was, but they used to say he is one month a woman and one month a guy.

He was the nicest fella that could be. He took that jewelry. He came to the ghetto. He brought us bread, whatever he could. If they would have caught him, they would have shoot him. He took my father's prayer shawl. To this day, my nephew has it. Because my nephew's religious. I want him to keep it. He davens in it every day, so let him have it.

And this guy gave everything back. So these two people were the ones that had a little feeling. But the rest, they were laughing.

They gave everything back after?

Yeah, when we came back. But the rest of the Gentiles, none of them had compassion. None of them had compassion. They were laughing. The Jews are going, good riddance.

You own neighbors?

Yeah.

What did you do about things like food? Were you able to get food?



In ghetto?

Yes.

They gave us some, very little. And like I say, my father had a friend in Munkács. The Munkács Jews they took later, a week later or so. So he was a rich fella. And he brought us something in. So a little here and a little there, but most of the time we were hungry.

And after that experience in the attic, then where did you go?

Then we went to the trains. That's the hardest part.

This is a month later.

A month later.

After you arrived.

We went to the trains. Also, they were beating the boys. I remember my brothers, how they were beating because he had one coat on the other. He thought maybe you could save at least a warm coat for later. Who knew what's going to happen. So they beat him and beat them by the train. And they pushed us in in the cattle wagons.

Who was doing the beating?

The Hungarian soldiers. At that time, it was all the Hungarian and the Ukrainians. The Ukrainians were worse than all of them. The [INAUDIBLE], we used to call them. They were very bad. And the Hungarian guards.

And they pushed us into the wagons and the cattle cars. I'm telling you there wasn't time-- a place to breathe. We were sitting like this, with our feet like that. I don't even know how many days. It seemed like forever, three or four days. The most, maybe four days. And we were going day and night. Nobody knew what day it is, what time it is. They took everything away, the watches, and everything.

And you didn't know anything about your destination either?

No, nobody. We knew it was no good, but as children, we always had hope. And you know, there was no bathrooms. There was not water. We yelled water, water-- nobody. And there was no bathrooms. They used to open once a day this much, the doors. And they had pots. And they used to throw out the waste. And it was horrible, horrible.

And one day, in the morning, it was about 5 o'clock, 4:30 I woke up. Everybody was dozing. And I look out the window. And I see this beautiful sunrise, which I never saw in my life. I never got up so early. And I said, oh, isn't that beautiful. I never saw anything like it. And I said to myself, look how nice it is.

Just I kept it to myself. Why is it so heavy for us on our hearts that we cannot enjoy this? And I started to cry. My mother woke up. She said, what's going on, why are you crying? I said, nothing, nothing. But this, I'll never forget the sunrise. That how I felt, the heart was so heavy. And we knew it was no good. And this is so beautiful. It was mixed emotions.

And we got to Auschwitz. We got to Auschwitz. They, like the film said last night, they pushed left and right. First the men. They grabbed the men. I didn't see my father at all. They grabbed the men. And my mother was with me and my sister was with me.

And my-- there was a man. And they used to beat us-- schnell, schnell, schnell, schnell-- fast, fast, out, out. There was no time to breathe. And there was a man that passed. He was walking by the trains. Those guys that are talking now,

they were talking to themselves.

And they kept saying, kids who are young, tell them you're older. Older kids, tell them-- I mean the women that have children, give the children to the older women. And he didn't stop. He kept talking. And young kids, tell them definitely you're older. And give the children to the older women, the young women. What did we know?

My mother says, see, Malka, did you hear what this man said? If they ask you? I said, ah, ma-- I didn't want to hurt her feelings never. Because she was so realistic. I was the one who didn't believe. My father didn't believe that it could happen. And I always had hope.

And she said, did you hear what he said? And I said, yeah, I heard, I heard, ma. I don't know. My brother came running-- they sent me to you. And we couldn't even look back. To this day, I am so angry at myself that I didn't look back which way my mother went. But later, far away, I saw the women walking. But you couldn't, because they'd hit you. They kept pushing you-- schnell, fast, fast, fast.

I come-- and on the way, I see a bunch of boys from our town. And I take a look. There is my three brothers. They were picked out for work. So it's good. I come to Mengele's table. And Mengele said to me-- I'll never forget those eyes-- he says, turn around. I turn around. And just me, he says, [GERMAN]-- how old are you.

I says, I'm-- then I started to think what the man said, what my mother said. I said I'm [GERMAN]. I'm 18. He says, do you know how to work-- [GERMAN]? I said, yeah. [GERMAN]? I said, yeah. Do you want to work? I says, yeah. And he says, OK. So I was saved. And my sister also. So I wound up with my sister. And we were together in Auschwitz. And my three brothers, I knew already that they are also at work.

What about your father?

My father they took. My father was an invalid in the First War. Also, they tried to get him for work, but they saw the bullet. And they pushed him to go to work. And he said, he can't work. He had a cane in his hand. So they knocked his cane out. And they said, you try and walk. And he wouldn't budge. I don't know if he would have survived or not. But he didn't work.

And your grandfather?

My grandfather went to the gas chamber. They all went to the gas chamber. Only those three boys that I saw.

And you and your sister.

Yeah.

I went the first night. Yeah, we came into the was supposed to be showers. I saw the group of women walking, but the men we couldn't see. They rushed them off so fast, the older men, that we couldn't see. They were the first one. Like I heard last night, they didn't want a revolt. So they got rid of the men. They're not going to have nothing from the women and children.

So what happened was we come in the bath. First of all, they shaved us all the way, our hair and wherever, all over. And then we undressed. First we undressed and shaved, that was it. Then I saw a friend of mine, her mother is there. She was a friend of my mother. I was jealous. I said, how come [Personal name] here and my mother isn't here? And I was so hurt.

So one daughter was already in the showers. And one-- the most beautiful girl you want to see. She was the most beautiful in town. And she stayed with the mother. And she-- and the SS saw that she had a cut. She had an operation. She was in the United States once and she was operated or something, had a hysterectomy or something. And she had a big cut. Right away, they put her aside.

So when the girl saw mother is on the side, she kept-- I saw them with my own two eyes, and she kept saying I'm going with my mother. And he said, no, you're not going. You're going for work. And she kept pushing herself. I want to go-- I don't want to leave my mother alone. Then he pushed and he said, you want to go, go. She went with her mother.

And the other young girl, my age, she was already in the showers. When we came into the showers, we didn't recognize each other. And she cried, where is my sister, where is my mother? And I said, I'm sorry, but they divided those. I didn't know where to.

So I get clothes there. So I get a black sock and a white sock. What do I know? I go and I complain to her. How come-- I says, it's a black and white socks. I got a good beating. What-- that was our girls from Slovakia, Polish girls. They were so already hurt and mean. It was you stayed home till now. You're complaining? We are here already three years.

Were these kapos?

Kapos. And I got a good beating for that. So, she says, you'll be satisfied with this.

Did this woman beat you or did somebody--

Yeah, this woman, our own. But they were so jealous that we stayed so long home, that you had your beds, and you were warm, and everything. And we are here already three years or four years. I don't know how long they were there. So they were the kapos there. They were the leaders. And of course, everybody wanted to survive.

So we got into those showers. We leave that shower. We got a prison dress, like over here, the gray, not the striped ones, just gray dresses. And I come with all my friends. We have a bunk bed, about 10 in a bunk bed or maybe more. We couldn't stretch, just sit like that. And we were screaming the first night. I was never without my parents. Everybody cried. Everybody screamed.

The next morning I go with my sister in the bathroom. They woke us up about 4:30 for Zahlappell, for roll call. Go with my sister in the bathroom. Comes a kapo from number 9 barrack. She stamps us. And she said, you're not going back there. You come with me. And she divided us from all our friends. And I didn't know anybody there.

But you were with your sister.

Only with my sister. So I met three girls that was from my part of the country. The others were all from [Place name] from [Place name] from-- different type of people, because I didn't know them. So we got together. We were supposed to be five in a line. We used to get up 4:00 in the morning. It was still dark. And stand in line for hours, and hours, and hours.

And we stood there. And that was going on and on. So one day-- and they gave us-- and they gave once-- in the morning we had a little coffee. And in the lunch, supper or lunch it was, they gave us a bowl of soup. No spoons, no nothing, just to drink, like the cows, like the animals. And I couldn't eat. I couldn't drink. I couldn't eat.

So the kapo comes over. And she says, what's the matter with you? Why don't you eat? And I said-- that was maybe a few days I was there. I said, I can't, I can't, I don't know where my parents are, and I don't know what it is. I cannot eat this. And she says to me, you see that smoke over there, there is your parents, all of your parents. They're burning them already. We didn't believe it. We didn't believe it.

How did you understand the smell?

Well, what do-- we were so confused, we didn't know what it was. And she said there is the smoke. Don't you see the chimneys? That's the people burning. We couldn't imagine something like that. So I still couldn't eat. And she says, a few more days, boy, you're going to beg for this bowl of soup. That's how it was.

I started to eat. I got sores in my mouth. And I didn't want to say nothing because they would take me away. So I don't

know how it healed without nothing. So it healed up. And I ate. And I was hungry. And I ate anything they gave us. It was like sand, a mixture of sand, with the potato peels, with all kinds of peels.

Did your sister react the same way?

My sister, I'll tell you about my sister. My sister reacted differently. She gave up completely. Something hit her and she wasn't the same ever. To this day, she's in a home. So what happened was finally we were there. We came to the beds. They send us all this to the showers. That's the only time I heard screaming people.

We were standing nude. Mengele examined us, a few others. And he took me out again. And he said, you stay here. He examined everybody, and sent to the showers, and he held me there. And I thought this is it. Then I knew already. Then I believed it already.

And then on the end, he called me back. He says, all right, follow the people. That was a couple of close calls. I wasn't developed. I was 15. And I wasn't developed, and hungry, and skinny. And so he always took me out of the line.

And finally, we came there. That day I saw transport come in with women. And in Hungarian, one woman says to me, an older woman, she said to me, tell me, where are they taking us-- through the fence. And what am I supposed to answer her. I said, don't worry, to a good place.

And it didn't take long. We stood there in Zahlappell hours and hours. I heard the scream. That's the only time I heard screaming. Then I knew what they'd done with them, with the gas. That this was-- instead of the water-- they gave them soap, a towel, and they sent them in. And instead of the water, they put the gas on. And you see, we went after and we didn't think nothing of it. We were like dummies. We didn't think that something could happen to us too and we didn't care. And-- and it was awful. It was awful.

So finally, it came to a conclusion that they're going to send us to Germany, after six weeks in Auschwitz. Oh, but I was going to say, I stay in the line on Zahlappell. And I see a woman across is fainting. As she is fainting, I'm sitting down. I fainted. I watched her and I went down automatically. Luckily, the women, the older women, they knew what to do. They had schmattas, rags, wet rags. And they started to wipe me. And they gave me like this, so I wouldn't be dry in my mouth. And I came to.

So was there six weeks. Then it came and order that we are going out. That's why I don't have a tattoo. I just had on my dress a band, a number.

So you were never tattooed.

No. They sent us out to Germany to work. 500 girls.

With your sister?

With my sister. 500 girls. We came to Gelsenkirchen. It was-- we worked on those barges, on the ships. We loaded bricks. And we worked by cement. We worked by dirt, sand. One day I saw this small of a guy, that he was the lagerfuhrer. Not the lagerfuhrer, he was the foreman.

And he's beating two good-looking heavy-set girls from Hungary. They couldn't-- they were better class. They couldn't lift a shovel. And he's beating them over the head. And he's beating them. They couldn't even lift the shovel right. I go over to him-- and me and my other girlfriend, she was a husky girl. And I was small. And i go over.

I says, I'm going to do the work. I volunteered for this work. I don't know what got into me. He looks at me, he looks at me. He says, what? Do? So, yeah. I never had either a shovel in my hand, but we had a like our own property at home and I helped my mother a little bit here and there. Potatoes, and things, we had our things home. We had our own chickens, our own cows, our own-- just for us, potatoes, and onions, everything. So I knew a little bit.

I go and I take that shovel. I don't know where it came from, but I was shoveling. And I-- on those-- the trucks, those big trucks, loading trucks, me and my other friend. She was used to it. She did at home too, she said. And we did that. And he saw that I am sweating like crazy. You know, that bad guy, he came over and he said, you sit down for a minute. He took over the shovel. And he started to shovel. Then he got somebody else. He says, I don't want you to do any more.

So I don't know what happened, but that was my luck. I always liked to work. I always-- I'm a workaholic. And I saved those two girls that were beaten. They didn't know. They were well educated. They were fine kids. And they never saw anything like this. So they were the ones who really went fast.

So this was that place. So we worked on the barges. And they were-- at night, we saw the sky lit up like crazy. We didn't know. It was already the bombing and the front. And we were living in a tent. We all had tents, big tents. And the bombs were coming down.

And yeah, that's the first time I saw the toilets, you know like we have here. There used to be soldiers living there. They had toilets. They had showers. What did I see? God, we had outhouses. So we came there. It was good. We were happy. We got rid of Auschwitz.

So we worked very hard. And we saw the bombs. And we saw everything. So we knew maybe, maybe we'll be lucky one day and we'll be free. So we worked there very hard. And one day there came a selection again.

And my sister comes running in. And she says, Malka, Malka, they're selecting. Everybody's running away. Everybody's running. She was all but 12 years for me. And somehow I had the sense. And I said to her, Lucu, I never run from nothing. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. To this day, I believe in fate. And I'm not running. They're going to pick me out for the crematorium, that will be it. If they're going to pick me for work-- but I don't want to volunteer for nothing. I should say it's my fault.

So she is going to hide. All of a sudden, I see she's following me. And she is following me to the line. And we're standing in the line. There, I saw a very handsome, very well-dressed man, and a few others. And he does the picking. And he calls many other girls. 500 girls he needed. And he calls me out. And I'm crying.

And he says, [GERMAN]-- why do you cry? I says-- that's when they separated us, but he didn't. I says, I have a Schwester here. I have a sister and I want-- I don't want to be separated. And that's when they usually did that. But he was-- he was fair. And he said-- [INAUDIBLE]. And he put me aside.

He says to my sister, come here. He looked her over. Turned her around. And he says, OK. Calls me over. He says, [GERMAN]-- child, are you happy now? I said, yes. So that's it. Whatever will be, we are together. At least-- because I saw that she's mentally already off balance and somebody will have to take care of her. We were taught to take care of the elders, to respect the elders, and not to talk back to the elders. And that's what I did. I saw that she's not normal.

So they picked us out. And they took us to Essen. I don't know if you heard?

Yes.

Where the Krupp factory is.

The Krupp factory. That was Herr Krupp, one of the guys. And somehow, because I was so young, I think I was even the youngest in the group, that he had a little compassion. And they treated us pretty good because they needed our work. All the guys were in the army in the fronts and they needed our help.

So they took us out to also barracks where the soldiers used to live. The first night was a bit-- big bedbugs. We had-- they were soaking our blood. You could feel such lumps one night. And if the light went on, it was worse. I mean, if it was dark, they used to bite. And if the lights were on, they used to be a little lighter.

The second day he comes over to check. He needs workers, not sick people. So he comes in. And I stay by the door here

in my barrack. And he says what is this. I told him [GERMAN]. He says, what? a [GERMAN]. That's bedbugs? I said, yeah. He said, don't worry. Two days later, he sent in fumigation people and they cleaned up the [GERMAN]. And we never had the [GERMAN] after.

It's not because he liked us, because they needed us. So we were-- so a few days later they took us to the factories. There was one [place name] Company. We worked there a little bit. But it was the little things. But here, we worked by ammunition. I used to make feathers for-- the springs for the things. Make-- I used to have to even it out with a stick and make it even.

If they didn't look, I made a lousy job. But if they looked, I had to do a good job. There was an old man, an old foreman. And he used to tell me the stories, why they took away the Jews. They took away the Jews, he comes, because they were all business people. They all had a lot of money. They used to stay in front of the stores with their pockets in their hands and they used to boss them around. The image of today are all over.

That's what he explained to me. I said, yeah, yeah. I was afraid to say anything. So once in a while, he used to come, he didn't have [INAUDIBLE] himself. So he used to come in with a little bread. He gave me a bite. Because his wife sent me. And when they came, Herr Krupp, for inspection, the food seemed to be a little more humane, more decent. Because they checked we should eat to produce.

So my sister, there she flipped out. She was supposed to bring me the springs to my table. And I had to work with them. She didn't want. We used to work one week night and one week daytime. She is not going to work, she tells me. You want to leave your health for the Germans. I want to take my health home. My gezunt I want to take home. I don't want to leave it to the Germans. She sat down under a table with another girl like her. And she didn't work.

So I carried her wagon. I never said nothing. Carrier her wagon, brought it to me. And I did my work and her work.

No one saw this.

No one saw this. But once they caught us, they were going to give her a good beating. And also, the same thing happened. They knew me, that I worked hard and he let it go. Sometimes he let it go, and sometimes we both got a beating, me and her. And sometimes, he knew me and I said, ah-- she fell asleep for a second or something. And I did-- the work is done.

They let it go. But many times, I got beaten because of her. So that's how she was. And she was all along trouble. I had all along trouble. I have to stay in line twice, one for me and one for her. So most of the time the guards used to recognize me. And they called me up. I got a good beating. This [INAUDIBLE] tomorrow, the second time you were in the line. But I did whatever I could. And she was all right. I mean, she wasn't all right, but she was safe.

So we were there in that Gelsenkirchen for-- I mean in Essen, we were there. They chased us in the bunkers and it was-- we were bombed day and night. I forgot where I was. Day and night, they bombed us. Day and night, but what was our luck. It was fate, I'm telling you.

When we were in the factory, the camp was bombed. When we were in the camp, the factory was bombed. And that was going on for weeks until we lived in a bunker.

Five minutes, and then we have to stop.

We don't have to-- we can continue after the five minutes. We have to take a break in five minutes, but we continue now. Good, I'll have a coffee. So he-- so we worked like that. So they-- the camp was bombed and the factory was bombed. We used to sit on those bombs-- the bombs that didn't explode. We weren't afraid. They used the dummies, you know. We used to sit on them and eat lunch on them.

And we weren't afraid of nothing. They used to push us in the bunkers, in the shelters. And we didn't want to go. And they used to push us. So one day we were coming in a bunker, but the Germans kept saying you must go, you must go.

They chased us to a-- and the shells were going all around us. I'm telling you, all around.

And he says to us, that was a beautiful city when we arrived, but then it was to dust. And he says, come on, let's go. There is a bunker, let's go in. And this one guard, he was [INAUDIBLE], not far from where we come from. So he used to tell us all the news, what's going on. So he says, let's go in this bunker. We come in that shelter. And there is the Germans, the civilians. And they said, well, it's the [GERMAN] Juden. Raus, out, we don't want you here.

And he kept fighting with them and they wouldn't allow us. So across from there was a shack that was bombed already. We ran in there. Was no roof, no nothing. You know what happened to that shelter? 150 dead people, the bomb went in there where they wouldn't let us in.

And the SS comes over, that Pole, the woman I'm telling you. And he said, oh, am I happy. I said, well it-- so he said, what are you happy? He spoke Hungarian. He said, you know, they wouldn't let us in there. They got bombed, he says. Now you should see how many sick they're taking out.

And that was true. 150 dead people were there. And he says, from now on, I stick with you wherever you go because you're lucky. This was this, in Essen. So we worked there for a long time.

About how long? Do you have any sense?

I have no-- I think it was till the middle of March in 1945.

So that would have been probably about six months or so, right?

Six months, right-- more, no?

You went there around September after you got out of Gelsenkirchen.

Yeah, maybe, yeah.

Yeah.

So we were there. There was not as bad as Auschwitz. So we had an order. We lived first in the bunkers. The factory was completely vanished. And we lived in the shelters. There was no barracks, nothing. Everything was burned down. None of the 500 girls were burned from the bombs. Can you imagine? And we were living in the shelters. And the one day, we got an order that we have to go.

At this point, Mrs. Appel, I think we'll stop for a few minutes.

OK.

And continue the story momentarily.