

[MUSIC PLAYING] Good afternoon. My name is Bernard Weinstein. I'm the Director of the Kean College oral testimonies project of the Holocaust Resource Center.

We are affiliated with the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. We are privileged to welcome Lilly Goldberger, a survivor presently living in New York City who has generously volunteered to give testimony about her experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust. Mrs. Goldberger, welcome.

Thank you.

I'd like to begin by asking you to tell me where and when you were born.

I was born in Czechoslovakian border and Hungarian. And when?

Yes.

1923, November 24.

What was the name of the town or city in which you were born?

Sã¡toraljaÃ°jhely. And in Slovak language was Nove Mesto.

Can you tell us a little bit about the town or the city that you came from?

It was a very nice town before the whole thing started. And we're very happy. We grew up, I had sisters and brothers and cousins and grandparents. And we were just one big family.

Everybody lived in the same community and--

Till I was about 10 years old, we all lived in my grandfather's house, which was very big. And there was my mother's brother. And she had two or three unmarried-- he had-- no, my grandparents had still three unmarried daughters. I just repeat, we were very happy there.

What did your father do for a living?

He was with my grandfather who was a wine merchant till things started to go bad. So that was here and there, all kinds of things. Whichever he can feed the family, he grabbed.

Did your family observe Judaism very strongly?

Oh, yes, definitely. They're very observant. And my brothers went to yeshiva.

We-- the girls-- were not taken that seriously. We just had our little davening in the morning and won our Hebrew writing and talking. But really it was the boys who were more important to send them to good yeshivas.

What was your own education like? Did you go to public school or--

Public school, right-- no, it was like a parochial school. And yeah, only Jewish children went there. Public school was not for us.

What percentage or what the amount of the population was Jewish where you lived?

I don't remember, I really don't. I have no-- there were lots of Jews and lots of streets where only Jews were living. But I cannot tell you, really.

Were Jews segregated in any sense--

No, not really. Not before.

Did you ever-- did you ever experience any kind of antisemitic behavior?

Yes.

Can you describe something prior--

After us all kinds of words. "You Jew," this and that. Then my father used to come home from the temple, and they grabbed his beard. And again, with all kinds of words which we didn't use in the house just because we were Jewish.

Was this before the outbreak of the war itself?

It was before, yeah.

Before 1939?

Right. Or when I went to the market, sometimes my mother didn't feel like going. So I went to the market to buy fruit and vegetables. And I picked up like grapes, and I said, how much is that? It was like a custom that you bargained.

Let's say, for example, they said, this is \$10, I said, I like to have it, but they gave it to me for \$8. So she says, OK, I'd rather give it to you than to a Jew. And then she used again the word because she thought that I was very blonde, I was Snow White, really. And maybe some of them thought that I wasn't Jewish. So she says I'd rather give it to you than to that Jew.

So what was--

And I was very young. And I was-- we got so used to it. We didn't even pay attention anymore.

And I had non-Jewish friends. We were very good friends. Like we couldn't have a radio in the house anymore, so I went over to my non-Jewish friends, and I listened to the radio. And we were very, very good friends.

And we used to sing the latest songs together. And we used to exchange books. And the same people, as soon as we left, they get them. We saw them running into the house and taking out everything, our own things. Your good friends.

So before the actual war came to you, they were real neighbors. And afterwards--

They were really neighbors, and they were very nice. And then we had somebody come in the Sabbath to light the fire or carry something like-- we couldn't carry, on the Sabbath, anything. It wasn't allowed.

My father even put this handkerchief around his neck. And we had non-Jewish friends who used to do like pick up the paper or something, certain things like that. And there were certain people really who didn't even think of the difference, except we would meet in their houses, we wouldn't even-- we were taught we don't even-- we were not supposed to drink water there.

Was that because of religious restrictions?

Because of religious, right. And that's what it was. And then it started.

Were you aware of what was happening outside your own country, outside your own area?

Yes.

How were you aware? What--

I was aware because we had the newspapers. My father used to read it to us loud. We were aware because-- like I said-- we went to listen to the radio, to Gentile friends. And my father didn't go in there. He just was standing outside the window and listening, like when Hitler made his famous speeches.

And wherever you went in the city, you saw the swastika. And he says, "Hitler is coming, you this and this Jew. You better watch out." And so it was on top of us-- let's put it this way-- the whole thing.

And then they had to close the school, Jewish schools. There was an Orthodox one. And there was a Reform Jewish school that I went, and they closed up, so we went to-- we try to go into the public ones, but we couldn't take it because we got too much harassment and abuse and all those, even from the girls.

In what ways did they harass you?

In what way? They didn't want to sit next to me. They didn't-- like, listen, you need a pencil. Sometimes, you forgot your pencil at home or your piece of paper.

And if you asked them, they wouldn't give it to you. No way. They wouldn't walk home with you.

Did you have enough Jewish friends in the public schools that you would be a group among yourselves?

Yes, sir. My cousins, we grew up like sisters and brothers. That's the way it was there in our town.

And everybody who was Jewish was treated the same way by the non-Jews?

Of course, yes. If my mother or my aunt had a headache, the whole family got together, and it was like-- it's unbelievable when I think about it. Oh, it was.

My grandfather coughed, so all the kids came from the country and all over because Zeida coughed. You know, cough, coughing. I hope you understand what I am saying.

Yeah, yeah. At any sign of something irregular or something--

They got together. And we are very, very close.

What signs did you see-- or did you feel yourself to be in any kind of personal danger before the war actually came to your city or to your country? Did you think that it was going to happen to you, too?

No, not really, even my father. And they used to-- they said that all the Germans are coming to Hungary, and they're going to put in the ghetto, and it's going to be horrible, and all this. And my father didn't believe it. So if my father didn't believe it, then it can happen.

Like we were coming home from someplace-- I don't know, maybe from the movies or something. And we used to live very near the railroad. Wasn't the railroad like, they say, that the house was shaking? It was a very elegant section, very nice, with the trees from both sides. And we used to spazier there. I don't know how to say it.

Stroll.

Right. And then somebody came. And they said the Italian Jews were passing in there. How you call then? They didn't call it train, cattle cars.

Cattle cars.

Right. And they are begging for father.

And you knew where they were going?

They didn't know where they were going. And we thought it was terrible, terrible, right? But two minutes later, five minutes later, we went home.

And not that we forgot all about it, but we just couldn't believe it, that it can happen. A year after-- I don't know when was the year when the Italian Jews went to Auschwitz. At '42.

'42.

We didn't think that this will happen to us. And then it did. Little by little, they took my brothers for this kind of labor. Came--

By this time, of course, the Nazis were already in your--

Very active.

In your area.

No, not yet. I think they were in Czechoslovakia-- no. When did they March into Poland, '38, right?

'39.

'39. Then they-- we didn't have the Germans there before '44. But the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] the Czechoslovakian people were running heavy overnight-- especially young girls-- and seemed so near to the border. They came, and they spend the night with us because my father was that kind of person. Whoever came in, he didn't have any fear or anything.

And when I'm thinking about something lately, I had papers. I had all kinds of-- no, I don't know, citizen-- because I used to go back to Czechoslovakia. And you needed like a visa or something to go through the border.

And my father felt so sorry for them that he gave them my paper, which if they catch them-- I don't know if it was stupidity or kindness, I don't know what it was. But for a moment, when I think about it, sometimes I stop, and I just can't believe it because he wasn't, really. He was a very smart man and everything. And I just-- maybe, though, he was so optimistic. I can't believe this.

You yourself were not optimistic?

I was. Still, I am-- no, not anymore, but I used to. I used to be very optimistic always. And even when the Germans came into our-- because I was in Budapest. Shall I tell you why I was in Budapest?

Please.

It's a very sad story. My brother, the second one-- the older one was already-- we didn't know where he was. The second one didn't want to go into that labor camp where my husband went. And he had money.

And if you had money in Budapest, you could go-- you can-- somebody arranged that you talk to a kind of doctor who can arrange that you go into that hospital, and you are crazy. So you can avoid that. So my brother called me up, and he said, come up, and you are going to be my guardian because you needed somebody. And he-- when I went to Budapest, he gave me an envelope, and he told me which doctor to go to.

And I don't have to say anything. I just have to say I'm Lilly Rothstein, and Yosef Rothstein is my brother, and put down the envelope on the table. And that's what I did, and I left. Then I had to visit him in the hospital.

When I visited him, he came out like-- he really looked like-- he was supposed to be with the uniform. And they give him the shock treatment. And he had beautiful teeth. But from the shock treatment, one had broken.

And I was sitting there and crying. I don't have to tell you that. I was crying so hard at the end. I didn't know then that they were watching me because there were hundreds and hundreds of Jewish boys who did that. And they wanted to find out if he's just-- they pretend or if it's true.

So my brother passed because I cried so much there, that he thought if she's crying, then he must be really sick. And I visited him a couple of times. And then I-- I don't know. I don't remember if he came out or not.

But anyway, it was Purim, and my mother wanted me to come home from Budapest, to be home for Purim because the boy couldn't come home. It was a small town. And they were worried that they will grab them.

In Budapest, you can disappear in certain ways because it was a big city. So I came home in a day or two days after the Germans came. So I never went back to Budapest. Purim is in March, April sometimes, right?

Mm-hmm.

March the 19th or the 20th, something like that came. The Germans marched in. So I never went back, and we-- I stayed till they came to pick us up to the ghetto.

I remember, in the ghetto-- I hate to tell you-- that was the red-light district, our ghetto. It was a small room surrounding. And I was reading *Gone with the Wind* when the Hungarians-- the Germans didn't pick us up in the ghetto, to take us to the ghetto cars, it was the Hungarians. They used to wear some kind of hat with the feathers-- very fancy, very elegant.

So I lived there. I finished the book when I came to America-- yeah, to America. And yeah, about my brother, shall I tell you what happened to him?

I don't know if I'm strong enough, but I have to tell you. I went to the ghetto, and my brother sent a non-Jewish lady to the front of the ghetto with Irish papers. We were very close with her six kids, but with-- yeah, see, somehow, we were very, very close.

You and he in particular?

Yeah, right. He said that he couldn't take it because he knew about Auschwitz and everything, and he wanted at least to save me. He couldn't save the whole family, but he wanted to save me. And the woman couldn't get to me somehow and even to Auschwitz.

We went to Auschwitz with my parents and with my two sisters. They told us that we are going to-- I don't know if you knew about the town, Kosice. There was in Czechoslovakia a very beautiful town. And they said they're going to take us there. And the old man said we're going to get white bread, and they're going to be-- the young ones will work, and everything--

The Germans told you this or the Hungarians?

I don't know-- I don't remember where we got this from. So when we got there, they said, Kosice. I had a raincoat in the car-- in the train. And I pick up my raincoat, and my mother said, I always thought you are smart, but you are not. We are not going to Kosice. We are going someplace else.

She knew somehow. So I figured if we don't go to Kosice, so we go to Praga or [INAUDIBLE] We got to Auschwitz.

And my father was the kind of person who was taking care of the family. My father was taken hostage when the Germans came in. My grandfather was one of the richest men in town. And they looked up the textbooks, and my grandfather wasn't alive anymore, I think. No, he wasn't.

So they took my father as a hostage. That was a Friday morning. And of course, we are sitting home and crying. And they took my brother Misha, who is in Brooklyn. And we are sitting down and crying.

And I have my older brother, oldest. We don't know where he was already. His little boy was-- [? Tilim ?] you know what [? Tilim ?] means?

Yes.

Saying, [? Tilim ?] for my father and Uncle Misha. All of a sudden, my father walks in with their fish for Shabbos. First, he went to the market to buy fish. And then he came-- that's the kind of man he was.

So when we got to Auschwitz, they opened the doors, and my father said, you just stay here, and I'll bring you water. I don't have to tell you that we were dying for a drop of water, right?

How long were you on the transport?

About three days, I think. I don't know. Three nights or two nights and three days. I don't know. It was--

Did you travel in a boxcar or--

Of course, on the floor with all the-- next to my mother. And my mother's biggest concern was-- listen to this, with all her sweetness, there is madness-- she was worried because there were borders, Czechoslovakia border, German border, Romanian. And she was worried-- when we were in that car-- that the war is going to be over, how we are going to get in touch with our brothers? You know what I mean?

Yes. She didn't see what--

Right. Even if she know we are not going to Kosice. Anyway, my father left looking for water, and that was the end. When we got down from the car-- from the train or car, my mother said, I smell human flesh.

And I don't know. I must have been real-- something was wrong with my brain because you saw all the [? tallis ?] and the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] and the books and the clothing from people. And I just didn't-- not that I didn't pay attention because I must have because I have seen it, right? But I still thought that we are going to be all right.

And holding onto my mother, my little sister was right in front of us and in-- no, it was like lightning from the sky. It was over in-- I don't know how it was over, but it was over. I have never seen them anymore, my little sister. And then I was there with my sister.

And the second one, Hanne, who got lupus and died here in Canada. Anyway, then they cut our hair. I don't know, I'm thinking about it, which one was worst? When they cut my hair, I thought, nothing can be worse.

And when they-- I never took a shower or a bath in front of my own mother. And the men, the SS men were just walking up and down. And we are standing there. That was horrible.

And then my sister started to cry because in the get-go, all the girls cut their hair short. And it so happened that I had very good-looking hair, and my father was very proud of it. And he didn't let me cut it. So I put a thing around it while we were in the ghetto.

And that's how I was there. And then they cut my hair, I said to myself, this thing is going to be over tomorrow, and I will be embarrassed to show myself to my father. And he was-- God knows where he was already, right?

You never saw him after he left--

Never. And what I-- I didn't believe that we won't see him because I used to write little notes and threw it toward the wires. And whenever the men came to the fire to talk to us shortly afterwards, I was always looking for my father.

And even when the Kapo said, if you don't keep quiet, or you don't-- you don't listen to me, you see that smoke going up there? You are going to end up there very soon. And I thought she was joking.

When we saw the smoke sometimes because we had to get out from bed 4 o'clock to-- I don't even know when it was. The first thing when I heard the whistle, "Aufshtein!" "Aufshtein!", first thing, we cried a little, and we got that because there was no other way. So when we saw the smoke, we thought, oh, my God, they are baking the bread already.

We are going to get fresh bread. You see how stupid can you be? And then shall I go back to my-- finish my brother story?

Yes.

But that was after the war, when I found out about him.

This was Yosef?

Yes, you're right. He was-- I was in Bergen-Belsen still after the war, like I told you. And then some people came. Oh, yeah, my brother Misha came to see us, to Bergen-Belsen.

He told me-- I said, where is Yosi? I haven't heard from Yosi. He told me-- he asked me if I want to know the whole story. I said, yes. He told me that Yosi was liberated with three other friends, one of them was Michael, my cousin or uncle, I don't know.

And they were walking through a forest or something. And SS members hiding and shot my brother. And there was-- he must have-- if it would be like in a city or near a hospital, I'm sure he could have been saved because they told us that he was three days there, suffering till he died.

They just shot him and left him there?

Right. And all this when I have no idea what happened. We have an idea because he wrote a letter, a goodbye letter to my mother. But we don't know where--

Can we go back for a moment to the ghetto?

Yeah, to the ghetto, right.

How long were you there in the ghetto?

Not too long, not too long because-- like I said-- it was March-- I think they came in 19 to Budapest. And then a day after or two days after, it must have been between 19 and 21 happening, then they left us alone because they were negotiating between the Jewish community-- there were 10 or 15 or 20 people who saw them, saw the Germans. All the time, they wanted this, and they wanted that. And they wanted gold the other day. They wanted money and all this.

So we were left alone. Then I don't remember-- I don't remember how it was when we find ourselves in the ghetto. That part, I don't remember at all. I just knew it was beautiful, like summery days because I had to help out in the hospital.

I remember we had to put on a uniform. Otherwise, we couldn't walk on the street. But we had some IDs that we are in the hospital helping. But only Jewish people were there, right?

And then when I heard that we have to go, there was number one transport. We were in the second one, I think. So of course, I left the hospital, and I went home to the ghetto.

And there was-- packed everything, packed very nicely with my mother's trousseau, which my grandmother bought her for 22 people, long-- and she got them in Brussels or God knows where. And we put it on our back, and we left. We went to the station.

I am very annoyed and very upset when I see that some people are questioning why didn't we escape, or why didn't we do something? How can you do anything when you worry that if you start, they-- we were sitting at the rail station on the floor, right? And they said, anybody who moves or stands up, I'll kill you, or I'll kill your father, or your-- we were worried always about our parents and my sister. I figured if I'm going to be brave, and I get up, then they kill my brother or my mother or my father or my sister.

And then when we were marching to the train, Hungarian Nazis were watching. We have four in a row with the machine gun, like this. We never had even a toy machine gun because maybe we couldn't afford it or which wasn't in style yet, to play with a gun at that time. So imagine standing there next to the-- then when you get to Auschwitz, all the SS and the dogs.

There was a girl, we were standing in line and waiting for her to be washed and cut her hair. That was before they cut our-- just coming from the train. Comes a very lovely girl out. She must have been Czech because most of the Czechoslovak girls used to speak Hungarian.

And she comes out, and she says, don't worry, girls. You just listen, and nothing will happen to you. Behind her was an SS with a German Shepherd, give her a slap on her face, that the poor girl fell on the ground. And God knows what happened to her. Then we got the message that we better keep our mouth shut and just listen--

Was this girl a prisoner herself?

She was already because she had no hair maybe because the Czechoslovakian girls were there for a long time already. All our Kapos were Czechoslovakian one, I think, or Ukrainian or-- our Kapo in the Block 11 was Czechoslovakian Jewish. She used to tell me how her father used to clean sanitary places on the street-- and the street and all this.

And she was such a revolutionary, or how you say that? That she took her father breakfast on the street in sterling silver cups and these trays and other things. She has her share-- her leg when-- because she was walking up and down, so we could see her. We were standing to be counted.

And she used to walk up and down with a stick. Pieces were missing from her leg because she told us that they were building those barracks there, that we had already when we got there. And if they stopped, or they did something wrong, they let the dogs loose on them. And I heard that she died. She had a heart attack or something there in Auschwitz after we left.

When you got to Auschwitz, was there-- when you got to Auschwitz, was there a selection? Did they make people go to the left and to the right?

But that's where my mother and my sister and my father-- but I just-- I didn't see. We were so bewildered, we didn't even see what's going on. After, when I was looking for my mother, I saw-- I was-- she was missing, and my sister. But I still thought that they took them to another place, really, where they take the young ones and the elderly ones.

And Mike's brother-- no, Mike's mother and sister was there with us. She was a very attractive, youngish-looking woman. And she came with us. We were together all the time. And then till Bergen-Belsen, she just couldn't take it anymore by the-- almost the very end.

How long were you in Auschwitz?

I was in Auschwitz from-- sometimes in May till-- when was Tisha B'av I don't know. What's the date?

Usually July or August.

I know because I was very hungry and very young, and I just didn't care about anything, guests, just food after a while. And when we got to the train station, again, going to Dachau, they gave us something which was so delicious, I just couldn't resist. It was like cabbage something.

And Mike's mother says, I can't believe it that Tisha B'av You were eating. She didn't touch the food. But I said, I can't help it, I have to. So that's why I know it was Tisha B'av

And we went to Dachau. We got off the train, like the sky was falling. There was I don't know how many thousands of girls. I think 1,500 from our barrack. We've had only one because we were going to-- we were going to Birkenau.

I don't know what was the idea. We walked with our Kapo. And I heard her talking to the SS woman. We were-- they were like next to me while we were marching. I don't know how far is Birkenau from Auschwitz.

It's supposed to be very close, I understand.

Yeah, we were walking-- yeah, I know now. I remember why we didn't go there. I heard her telling-- our Kapo telling the SS woman, this block is the healthiest, hardworking DF. So healthy, there was never even a headache in the block.

And I said, oh, no, they're going to send us home because we are so healthy. I know why we went to Birkenau because there was a girl, she was a doctor or something or the model. You see that, I don't remember. So working in that hospital where they made all those horrible things--

Experiments.

Right. When you walked in there, you thought this paradise, the flowers. After our little barracks where we slept in a piece like this, 10 people together, and when one had to turn, they all had to turn.

If you walk into that magnificent, gorgeous, modern place, and then nurses with that snow-white. We had that thing going on us, so I don't know how many weeks after we got to the same thing. And gorgeous haircut.

So I don't know, the mother or the daughter was working, and they called her outside because we were not supposed to go in. The outside meeting again. They met, and I couldn't understand one thing because we were in the very beginning there. We were not that stark yet.

They just embraced, and they didn't even talk. And they just looked and smiled a little at each other. And I said to myself, my God, if my mother would come or-- we would scream from happiness and kissing and hugging and all this. Now I know why, they were afraid that-- they were afraid to show emotion or God knows what.

Anyway, we went back to Birkenau. And shortly after, we went to Dachau. And Dachau wasn't so bad. The only thing, till we got there, the train, we were marching I don't know how many hours.

It was so sad that we couldn't open our mouths. We didn't talk to each other. We just walk, then walk, then walk. And because there-- and there was a little, nice, brand-new barracks. And everybody got the cover.

And we haven't seen no SS, nor the chairman, nothing. We just had the old Kapos. Or they named themselves Kapos, I don't remember. But it wasn't so bad, except that I got very sick.

It must have been from the train or something that I got very sick. And they put me in the Revier, they called the hospital. Beds, not really beds but like-- and I was so-- I didn't know I was so sick. My sister had to go to work. And every night when she came home, she did thought that I wasn't there anymore.

Finally, after-- I don't know, I was there very long, for 10 weeks or something. Finally-- oh, yeah, my sister used to sing beautiful "La Paloma" and all this. And she got bread. And she brought me bread and farina.

That's very nice. That's what kept us alive. And I heard when there was a new SS person came throughout Dachau, she was introduced. She was-- the Kapo, I think, was telling the SS, oh, and then we have a little girl here who sings beautiful, wunderbar. And you will hear her.

And that was the attraction out there. Then the Kapo or the head of this famous hospital came to me, and she told me, I think it would be much better if you get out because the SS woman asked me already. I don't care because if you are there long, they take you, and they throw you. They have no [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

So I got out, and my assistant and all my good friends were hiding me, so I shouldn't go to work because I couldn't. I couldn't walk, and I couldn't march. And then this is a little embarrassing, but I stayed in the camp inside. I was walking around, and I had two left shoes.

And the men's camp was next to us, of course. And there was-- we called it magazine, where all the clothes where. And if you needed something, designer clothes, then they take you in over there with a Kapo, of course. Alone, you couldn't pass the gate.

And this Frenchman who was taking care of the clothes there says his girlfriend was our Kapo. So he says to her, listen, how can you let a nice-looking girl like her walking with this two left shoes when I have here a bunch of shoes? Why don't you bring her over?

She didn't like that, I know that because after that, every morning, "Wo ist Lilly? Wo ist Lilly?" She was looking for me because I was hiding till they left for work. She grabbed me, and she sent me to work from then on. So I worked.

And I don't know how I got through because I really haven't got the strength somehow. I needed a long time till I recovered from that. I had fever. I had fever. And so you get so weak, that you can hardly talk.

Did you have food?

Yeah, in Dachau, it wasn't bad. And then they're out in the-- we used to work for farmers sometimes. So we were not shy to take potatoes or something in a--

Why do you think it was so much easier there than it was in Auschwitz or Birkenau--

Because Auschwitz was the real-- in Dachau was a brand-new Lager. And I think Wehrmacht was there. They were Wehrmachts before they became SS. They were forced to-- I really don't know that. But they were not bad to us.

And it was a small place because not all the 1,500 girls went in the same one. We were-- one was in-- I forgot the name of the towns. It was like in the country, it was beautiful. We had fresh air.

In Auschwitz, you breathe the horror. But there was-- we were in the forest. And we were-- I don't think we were more than, let's say, 300, 400 in one place. That's why we know everybody.

And one SS man who took care of us. I think it was only one SS man. And then he picked the Kapos, women and men who took care of the-- everything should be-- like food and everything should be taken care of.

Were the Kapos humane there?

In Dachau, yes. In Dachau, more or less, except this one who had an eye on me and send me out to work. But she was-- she couldn't hurt me. She didn't touch me ever or anything.

She just made sure I wasn't around because she wasn't an attractive woman. She was Polish. She was that tall and very--

Round?

Anyway, they got married after they were-- my sister saw them in Canada. Then came-- Mike's mother used to work for an SS member in the kitchen. And she used to bring sometimes stuff-- back stuff. I mean not filet mignon. But potatoes for us was--

A luxury.

Of course. And then she came back in the evening, and she left in the morning. She had to come back in the evening. And she had a-- she could have stayed in Dachau, but she had a sister with a daughter. And she wouldn't leave her.

So she volunteered to come with us to-- first of all, we didn't know where we're going. But she wouldn't leave the sister, so she came with us to Bergen-Belsen. I tell you something, no words, no books, no movies, no film, no nothing can describe Bergen-Belsen. No way. But we found there.

You were there in the last months of the war?

I was there from-- I don't remember, end of October or beginning of November till the liberation, April 15. We were standing in the snow early in the morning for hours. And we had to listen to speeches about the fatherland because we have to work for the fatherland to be great and to be a mother.

Then we went to work without food, horrible. I couldn't eat the food in Auschwitz. I didn't touch it. Can I tell you something from Auschwitz, going back to Auschwitz?

Please.

I couldn't eat the food. Mike's mother and I, the big pot for 10 people. And you had to-- And the first day when I smell the food, God knows what kind of meat was it. I just couldn't. And we-- whenever we went, we always made sure. With my sister, we were on the third floor because I felt we get more air in the penthouse. When I was watching, they used to bring in the food from the back in the big-- I don't know the name of those. Well, like they put the garbage now, big ones, right?

Big can or big bath, yeah.

They brought in the food there. They stopped in the back. Certain girls went almost every day-- oh, no, no, no, they called the-- because block over, they call it, I don't know, six or seven roll up their beds, had RVs at-- obviously, Eric and I don't know.

I'd like-- four ladies. And those four ladies went to the back door with their pots. And they took out the meat from the bottom and ran to their bed, and they divided between themselves. And I saw that, and I couldn't take it.

And every day, I said to them, you should be ashamed, I would say. The curse was in Auschwitz. You should never go home, she said. You are not allowed to go-- no, you are not-- you don't deserve to go home because you are doing that. You are taking away food from your other--

And one day, it got so noisy, that the Kapo that-- red-haired Alice was her name-- came over, and she says, what's going on here? What is that noise? So the four ladies say that blonde upstairs there, she wouldn't leave us alone. Come on down.

Referring to you?

That was me. I went down. And Alice was with a stick and a pencil in her hand. And she took the stick in the other hand, she was ready to hit me.

And in Hungarian, when you have a little respect, or you love somebody, you don't say Alice, you say Alice-ka, like Doctor Lilly or Ma'am Lilly. You know what I mean? It sounds like a--

It's an endearment.

No, that's in Yiddish. Yeah, yeah-- no. Alice-ka is in Hungarian. I said, Alice-ka, please listen to me before you decide to do anything to me.

OK, she listened. I don't-- that was a miracle. I said, you can ask everybody around here, I don't touch the food. I am not talking for myself.

But I am talking about those people who can hardly wait to get that little soup or the piece of meat in their food. And these people comes in-- remember, I used-- we never used to talk Yiddish at home, but I used the word [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] comes in, runs to the food, and they grab it with a big spoon. And then they divide between themselves. And I found it very unfair.

Actually, she says, kneel down for five minutes. She saw that I had something. You know what I mean? I'm not-- I wasn't defending myself.

And then I remember, Mike's sister and mother was on the other side, across the street from us. And all my friends from our shtetl there on the top floor. And Alice-ka turns around and she says, is that true? And they were afraid to talk, they just did like this.

So many years, I'm shivering. I think I've had it. They just did like that. And she knew that it was true.

Kneel down for five minutes. After she left, I got up, and then no more black market anymore. No more. And so I felt-- I was happy about it.

You got a certain amount of satisfaction--

Exactly, right.

Go back to Bergen-Belsen and tell us.

Bergen-Belsen, yeah, we were very lucky in a way with all the terrible things. We found a girl who liked my brother Yosi. And she-- we know her from home because she was a country girl, but she used to come to our city, and then they were-- I don't know, they were friends.

She spoke perfect German. And she was very, very capable. I cannot find another better word.

That was [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. How you say [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] in English? You were like baskets--

Weaver.

Weaver, right. We called it weaver. She was the fourth lady there. And she took us there every morning. And that was our good luck because at least, we breathe the fresh air because thousands of people were on the floor.

We never-- my sister and I, we never had a pimple or anything. As soon as they saw you, I saw my friends literally rot away. And we didn't because we've had fresh air, and maybe it wasn't in our blood to get those horrible things. And we

got better food there.

And we were treated a little better because we had-- and my sister was singing. And so maybe. I don't know, who knows? Maybe that was our-- how you say that, that we survived? We're not laying on the floor month after month and waiting for that piece of bread.

In other words, people were just lying on the ground.

And we went to visit them sometimes. My God. Girls from home whom I know, they have far worse. And all the insects you say, all the--

Lice.

Lice. Can you imagine?

Did they have beds? Did they have any kind of--

No, they were-- in Auschwitz, we had beds because of her, of my relative, the four lady in the-- wait, but I forgot what to say. But thousands of people just on the floor. We had to go and see them sometimes because we missed them. So I don't know, in the evening or-- I don't even know why we had time to see. No, no.

After the liberation, the first thing was we went to see them. My sister and myself, we were somehow a little far away. And I couldn't walk, so my sister put me down every five minutes to rest.

And because I wanted to see Mike's mother because my mother and her were the best friends. With all the biggest stories, they were in a good mood. They were laughing. They were gossiping. And after, I haven't seen my mother, I felt like maybe she will know something.

I just wanted to see her. She was the closest to me after that. So I went with my sister, she wasn't there anymore. And the sister was there. And his sister-- my mother-in-law's sister-- let's put it this way-- wasn't there anymore.

And friends with whom I was in Auschwitz, because in Auschwitz, you still look like human, except the hair because it was short now. When I saw my friends there, I just couldn't believe it, that I looked like that. I must have because I didn't have the strength to walk or eat or anything. I had typhus when we were liberated.

And I was screaming for water, and my sister brought me water in a plate. And it was full with God knows what. And I was drinking it like crazy.

And the most delicious gourmet thing was for us the-- it looks like a melon, and it's yellow inside. I don't know how you call it in English. In Spanish, you call it calabaza. Sometimes they put it in the soup or bake it in the oven.

I know what you mean. I can't think of the name.

And that was poison for a person who had typhus, but we loved it. We just loved it. And then we were-- after liberation, we were still on the floor for a long time because they couldn't handle that many people. So we were waiting there. And luckily, they came in time.

I think at this point, we're going to stop and take a short break and continue--

OK, I'm going to smoke a cigarette.

Good.