

We continue with the testimony of Ilona Werdiger. Ilona, you were telling us about your experience in Birkenau. Would you like to continue, please?

Yes, another chapter. Yes. So August the 6th, we arrived to Auschwitz. And I told you about shaving of the head and so on. We arrived to Birkenau, that's right. That was part of Auschwitz. There was no working. There no factories, no nothing. But there would be minefield in Birkenau that's why we still had got the tattoo.

So that means that just in case they need some people to work, we still have the chance to do something. And if you were working, you had the chance that you would be alive, you know, that you are still needed. So we were there. They had to one. They had Birkenau field one. That was on the front end. Everything was wired. you know, electric wire. And they had pits right where we were.

Then they had lager gypsy. And this was going to gas chambers. And in the middle of the night, they would count the tracks. And suddenly, we hear cries and screamings. And they would take them out of the barracks, load them on the trucks, and straight to the gas chambers. So we have been in Auschwitz.

We got once a day they give us a piece of bread and a little soup that had no taste whatsoever. And we were sitting from the morning there and feel like not doing anything. Every-- all the time, a German woman would come and would segregate us, would tell us to go on outside, go inside, you know. And all the time, was something that we were waiting for a surprise for a bad surprise.

But there was nothing that we were doing there. Nothing. No working, no, no, nothing. Just standing like this either in the barracks or outside the barracks. And every few weeks, they would come, and they would segregate the women. They came a few weeks after I was in Auschwitz. They came. They took away 2,000 young girls to Stutthof.

I was in line because we all wanted to leave Auschwitz. We wanted to get out of there. So whenever we saw a German that came to pick some women, we thought maybe for the work, that would be a solution that we would get out of the Ghetto. So at that time, when they went, they picked 2,000, the most beautiful girls. They cut off just before me. They cut off two lines. Then we found out that they all went to Stutthof.

They put them on, not boats, but but that-- just like a piece of wood. How do you call those? Barges-- barges?

Barges.

Barges, yes. And they were drowned. That's how they died. And then after a few weeks later, they came they took other people. You know, each and every few weeks, they would come. They would pick some people. I don't know, for work or what. I was lucky when they came. That was the end of '44.

And most of the Germans were already at front. And only the older soldiers remained in Germany. So they needed people for the factory, for the workers to make ammunition and so on.

So came a German and picked 200 women to go to that ammunition factory to [? Vilisztal ?] by Chemnitz where they worked in Saxony. So they picked me and my girlfriend. I was amongst the 200. So they picked us, we got some clothing, and we went to Germany. And that was a salvation because if not of that, I would not be alive.

So they took us there and we were working, it was a big ammunition factory. It was coming to an end already. The war and the fighting between the Germans and the Russians was going on, so all the time they would have sirens because those escadrilles of planes were coming. Suddenly the sky got all silver, so quickly they closed the factory.

All the German people, they had bunkers. They went to the bunkers and us they pushed back to the barracks. And we stayed there and they closed us in the barracks and we looked through the windows. And we were so happy that we see some sign of something going on. And we did not care, they could bomb us and we really were so indifferent to life, believe me, we did not because I never believed that I'm going to survive. I did not believe.

But in compare with Auschwitz, it was a paradise because working there we were working amongst the Germans. So they had still to give us a little better dress, we got rations there. We should be fed quite well, but they took away everything. They were stealing everything from us. But still we got some bread, some soup. And again, I was lucky. I was working in [? Schweitzerei ?] This is where-- you know, where you wear that mask, where the fire goes you put together two metals?

Yes.

Soldering.

Soldering, yes. So in order to work in soldering, you had to be covered, you see? Because the fire should not go out. So I was working with an old German man and he had pity on me. So when he brought his soup in a little dish, he would bring two spoons and give me a little soup.

So I used to say to him in German, oh, I hope that I'm going to meet you after the war and I will be able to give you up for the goodness that you did to me there. So you know what he answered me? You don't understand German, so I will say it translated. I'm sure that if you would meet me after the war, you wouldn't want to talk to me. An old German soldier, that's what he told me. But he was very good to me.

But one day the manager, the German woman that took care-- you see, when you were in the sink you could see the legs. You couldn't see the tap. So she saw me there and I don't know if she had some suspicion or something. She took me out into the barrack and she said, I am going to shave all the hair grew up a little bit already, a tiny bit. You know, from Auschwitz it was all shaved, but it started to grow.

So I had a little bit of hair. She said, I'm going to shave off your head because you are talking to this man, to this worker. But then she did not shave off my hair, so I was working there again. And soon after this, the war was going on and they wanted to finish it, so they took us and put us on train.

And we supposed the destination's supposed to be Flossenburg, which was a camp just with gas chambers. They destroyed you completely. You came there and they burned you right away. But the war was going on already and they couldn't bring us to Flossenburg anymore. The bombs were going, everything was being bombarded so they sent us to Theresienstadt

In Theresienstadt, it was a horror. Mountains of dead people. Mountains, people just like that, typhus, starvation. Unbelievable. And then I was there for a few weeks, then came the Red Cross. We put on their white Red Cross, you know? But they had white crosses. So the Germans could not touch us anymore.

And soon after we didn't have to-- we had no food, nothing. We were starving. This was the time, also, when I physically broke out the most. Mentally I was broken down already, but then my girlfriend told me, you look horrible. You look so bad, she said, that I was afraid that any minute there would be an end to you.

Yes, that was the worst point in my life physically, you know? So but they couldn't touch us anymore and soon after came the Russians and they liberated us. And with the liberation they brought food and they gave us the food and I spoke a little bit Russian because I was under the Russian occupation, so I was getting bread from them.

But I was very careful and I said to my girlfriend, Anya, I said, Anya, we don't eat much. Let's eat a little bit, because if not we're going to get sick. People, when they saw the food, they were throwing themselves on the food and they started to eat and because of that they got sick. And there was that sickness of the stomach and they were dying like flies, like flies. Mountains and mountains of dead bodies.

But thank goodness that we did not get sick because we were very careful and soon after I said to Anya, you know what? Let's get out of here. We are going to go to Israel. I know-- oh, we started to look for family right away. We found out that our families did not survive, that nobody was alive.

So I said, look, we are going to Israel, and my parents were not Zionists. A religious person usually is not a Zionist, if you know. They were not Zionists. But I said, we suffered as Jews, this is our country. We should go there.

And then I have my aunt there. I have one aunt, my father's sister, that went before the war to Israel. She was a big Zionist. She ran away from home and my grandfather suffered terribly. That was a disgrace to him, but she was a very strong-minded person and she did what she wanted to do anywhere she believed in. So I said, we're going to Israel.

So we went from Prague within a Red Cross car to the American zone of Austria-- that's how I came to Austria-- in order to go to Israel. We went there. We were waiting for transports but it was very complicated even to smuggle Jews to Israel.

And then the exodus came. So they stopped the transports, then the war broke out. So I said to Anya, you know what, let's wait. I have no strength to go from one hell to another one. Let's wait and see, and then we will go to Israel. In the meantime, life was going on. I had nobody to support me. I was a young person.

You know, life goes on when you are young, no matter how you suffer. But you see life in different prospects. You know, I wanted a nice dress, I wanted to get dressed, I wanted a little good food and so on. So I went to work and I worked. At first when I lived in Bad Ischl, I worked in an office so I made a little bit money.

We got paid with cans of food that we got from the Americans from you know cans from UNRRA So part of it went to buy a little dress to sew it, to buy a piece of material. I was used to be dressed nicely and I supported myself. Then when they sent me to Linz, I got a job in the American Joint Distribution Committee. I had the knowledge of English, little knowledge.

Before the war my parents took a tutor and they taught me English. It started to become a very popular language. So I was working in the immigration department they put me and it started with immigrations. So being that I was in the office, wherever they came from, Canada or from Australia, from the United States, I would register myself and then I got married just before we went to America. I was got married.

How did you meet your husband?

Oh, I met my husband in Austria. That's another story. Everything is a story. When I was coming back from Czechoslovakia with my girlfriend, Anya, I had another friend that we were very, very close. She found out that her brother survived, and her sister.

So she left us in Theresienstadt and she went to join her brother and sister, which lived in Austria just behind Linz, a little suburb of Linz. How did they call it? I forgot what the name of this was.

Anyway, on the way there I said to the chauffeur, please, I would like to step over to see my girlfriend. And my husband was there because he was in concentration camp with her brother in every concentration camp, so after the war they went to live together. And then so the sister came and the other sister, so they were like a family and I came there and my husband met me there and that's how it started.

So my husband and I registered I was just my husband we just got married. So I registered my husband and myself. They didn't take me to Canada, but they took my girlfriend to Canada so that's when we parted. And she still lives in Canada. To Australia they didn't take me, but when it came to the United States, they knew me. I was young, I may be a little popular, I don't know.

So whenever they saw my name, right away they granted me a visa and they pushed my name. So I took six months, we had a visa and we came to the United States. There were people that were waiting for years because they had relatives in the States, and they received affidavits from them but they had to wait a long time until they could come to this country.

I had nobody here. I was a displaced person and because I worked there and the people knew me so and I registered

myself, my husband, they saw my name, they were pushing it. We came even earlier than we supposed to because they had an additional room for certain people. So they pushed us into it. I had no time to buy something to prepare myself that's how we came to the United States.

Another story. When we came to the United States, we had nobody here. Everybody who ever came by this little boat-ship, but it was a ship-- I was so sick, and my husband. So somebody came to fetch them to the boat. They took them to their houses. We had nobody.

We were one of the youngest, we had nobody came to pick us up, nobody came to claim us. So we had no money, even for a taxi. So from the HIAS they came and we went by them with the taxi to the HIAS. We lived in the HIAS for about three weeks. There were other people that lived there for months because you get for free food and you could sleep there, so they could save some money.

We came there and I got sick from all the aggravation. I said to my husband after what I went through, I have to live in the HIAS. My husband was in a different room. He was in a room with maybe 40 people; I was in a room with 12 women. Horrible, terrible. I said, that's why I survived and I came to the United States? To live like this? It was terrifying, it was terrible experience.

So we befriended there the president of HIAS, became friendly with him. Actually, Cohen was his name. So right away he said, I'm going to get you a furnished room, don't worry. You won't to stay here. I said, Mr. Cohen, I have to get out of it. I cannot stay here, you know?

So he got us a little room in Borough Park. So we lived in a furnished room there and then we moved to a different furnished room because the lady, the owner of this house, she wasn't very friendly with me. She disliked me for some reason, I don't know why, and so I could not endure.

Her husband was Hungarian, also came from Europe, and she was, I don't know, American of Hungarian descent? And he used to talk to us because he saw another European couple that came from Europe, so we had a lot in common. And she was angry at me, I don't know.

She didn't like me, so we got out and moved from there to Williamsburg. Somebody recommended me an apartment in Williamsburg. So this was a walk up apartment, not nice, but the people were marvelous. Marvelous people. In fact, it was a mixed couple. It was a gentile with a Jewish woman. The family deprived her of-- you know, they didn't want to know her before she married the gentleman.

But he happened to be a very nice, cultured, intelligent and they loved each other very much. And that Jewish woman, she was very happy to have us there, you know? Us Jews. We still identified with Judaism. So we had a little room, but kitchen privileges, and it was wonderful because they welcomed us.

We loved each other so much that when I got an apartment, I didn't know how to tell her we are going to move out of there. And we became Americanized. They helped us to Americanize. They helped us to learn the language. We went in the evening to school too, but they helped us and they broke us into the United States life, and so we had a deep liking to each other.

When did you become a citizen?

Oh, right. We came for five years after [INAUDIBLE].

Five years?

Oh, right away, of course. So that was a nice experience in spite of that it was a terrible neighborhood, it was a walk up, it was a tiny room. But the people were lovely and we loved each other. We felt wonderful with them, we felt wanted, you know? They didn't look down at us in contrary, so it was a nice experience and two years.

We lived there for two years because I did not want to go to live on the Lower East Side or somewhere where I would get depressed. So we stayed there until I got a decent apartment, two years it took us to find an apartment. And it was lovely there, it was a beautiful apartment house with a doorman, with young American couples, just as young as we were. Young professionals that just came out of schools, a little lawyer a little doctor, you know?

And we became very friendly there and we were working, of course, my husband as well. Oh, that was another experience with working. My husband we went to work to a factory. He was making \$19 a week. I made more, I made \$25 a week.

So we lived like this-- I said to him, we decided that as little as we make, one week goes into the bank and for one week live. We paid \$30 a month for this room, so we could live for \$19 a week. We could live. So that's how we started our life. We had nothing.

I found later on, or in between, my uncle in Belgium. They found me. They found me still when I was in Europe and they wanted me to go to Belgium very much, and I was not married at that time. And my uncle wrote to me that I need to go to school and I need a family, I need an education.

But I was so scared of Europe. I was afraid to remain in Europe. I did not want to remain in Europe. And Belgium is a beautiful country, a very affluent country, a very civilized country, and I am sure I would have family.

The only thing, when we were building our lives in the United States all through the years-- even though we were climbing little by little, little by little, elevating our life in every way, educationally and economically-- but I was always missing my family very much. Especially when holidays came I had to look for friends to invite them until now to be together.

But I was afraid to stay in Europe, so we came here and I had no family here even though there's my husband. My children were brought up without family. I have two beautiful boys, I must say. One is a physician, graduated from Cornell Medical College attending Brandeis before. A very fine, very fine-- most of all, what makes me proud of my children is that they are wonderful human beings. Modest people, not braggers, not talkers, big, you know?

What does your other son do?

My other one is an architect, finished architecture in London in School AAA, London School of Architecture, and also made a master's degree at Columbia in business administration because he combined. My husband is in the construction business, developing business. His brother was an architect before the war, so I guess it's in the family.

So my younger son's also so He combined architecture with development. But my son lives in New York City and he make his master's in business administration because he works-- at first he worked for a very big, very prominent architectural firm. Skidmore, maybe. you heard about Skidmore. Very prominent.

And the reason he got into that was because a lot of them are graduates of the London School of Architecture, you know? Syracuse and London School, so that's how he got into it otherwise he could have not. But you know, he stayed there as long as he could grow. Once he stopped growing there, he said, I have to leave that place because he's not a pusher.

He's not the type to talk sweet and so on, so he told them that this is not for him. He wants to grow. So he decided to take a master's in business administration and he worked for another firm. He got himself a job for one of the biggest developers in New York City. I would say in the category of Ronald Trump-- but not Ronald Trump. Not--

Donald Trump?

--Trump, but in the same category. And he got his job there. And so he left the job and he went to Columbia to combine, to get the master's. He knows developing, he's an architect, so it worked for-- and right away that helped a lot because his salary went up there and Mr. [Personal name] saw that he's a very ambitious young guy. So he made the master's in

1 and 1/2 years, was working night and day and no vacation and no summer and no nothing, but he made it and he's now vice president of that firm.

Have your sons asked you about talking about these things that happened to you?

[INAUDIBLE] until they were teenagers we never discussed that subject with my children. The reason for it was I wanted my children to be brought up in a normal atmosphere. I did not want to be influence them by my past. But later on when I came out and they started to ask questions, they did.

They told me, they said, mommy, did you think for a minute that we did not know what was going on? He said we saw you, that you-- full of books, the house has a lot of Holocaust books all kinds. Everybody writes books.

We were brought up without grandparents, without cousins, without uncles, without aunts. We had nobody, just the four of us. He said, how could you think for a minute that we did not know what was going on? But I did not want to talk about it, it's just lately that I came out.

And he did not want-- would you believe it? I have this tattoo, I never wear a dress with a short sleeve. And not because I'm ashamed of it, because my doctor wanted me-- he said, I would take it off for you. It will not cost you a thing. What do you need it for? Why do you need to look at this?

I said Dr. Getzel, no way will I get-- but I don't wear a dress short because people kept asking me questions. When I was going to work when I first came to the States-- that is almost 30 years ago, almost-- I was young, I was going by subway holding and people would ask, is this your telephone number?

Yes, or they would approach me, they would ask me other questions. I was so annoyed by that. That's why until now-- it could be very hot outside-- I will not wear a dress, but I don't want to get rid of it. I don't want to. Don't want to part with this. So I never spoke with my children about it. Never.

But they knew all about it. They know everything, but they are born in this country. They are Americans, although they have seen European influence, but they Americans and they go their way. They are scientists, both of them, so they are not very religious. Well, what can I say?

You mentioned at the break that you made a trip to Poland recently.

Yes.

Would you tell us a little of the highlights of that?

To Poland?

Yes.

It was a very sad experience. It was such a sad experience. We arrived to Poland. First of all, those poles. I must say, usually I don't hate people and I really don't hold really a grudge against-- I felt it was my bad luck that at the time of the Second World War, geographically, I was situated in this part of Poland that I had to suffer. Would I be in the United States, I would not suffer, or Australia or so.

So it's not that I go around and I would say, oh, because of you or something. I'm not critical of people. It was my [INAUDIBLE], my bad luck, that's all. But the Poles I hate because so many more Jews would survive, so many more, if they would only show a little humanity. Not to help us, because it was dangerous for them too to help us, but at least not to give us up, not to torture us. You see?

So I came to this country there and right away when I looked at those faces, they are not sophisticated people. You see? Right away, they very ignorant. We came there, they heard my husband speak Polish so they asked, can you speak

Polish? He said, yes, of course. I was born here.

So my husband's name is Marian David, you know? But David, but this is not a Polish name. So my husband told him, I'm a Jew. You know? This is my Jewish name. Right away he knew that we were Jews. They show you now, they still anti-Semites. So this was the first experience at the airport that they were not friendly, they did not look at you, they did not speak to you, they did not greet you. You know?

It wasn't pleasant to be there, you felt like a stranger. We are strangers in a country that I was born in. So we came there and we came to Krakow. I'm not talking about that they did not progress at all. In fact, I think they went backwards, you know? They don't go in [INAUDIBLE] They go back.

But anyway, when we arrived to Krakow-- first we went to Krakow-- my husband started to run in the city like a maniac. I couldn't talk to him. Then here I was born and here is my school and this is the parkway and this is here. Oh, gosh. You know, it was so emotional. Terribly emotional coming to this country.

Then we had the reunion from high school there. It was the Hebrew high school that my husband attended and they decided to put two plaques on the walls of the buildings that once was the home of that Hebrew high school. So the two plaques, one was written in Polish and one was written in Hebrew.

Observants of this school came from London, representatives, the ones that graduated or attended that school. A group of 30 something people from Israel, came one from London, from all parts of the world. We happened to be there. We came and participated in that ceremony too.

So when they cut the ribbon, first of all there was a remark made out of somebody. You better put those plaque high. High, as high-- they shouldn't be able to reach, otherwise by tomorrow they won't be there. Then to this celebration was invited Israeli Counsel. Now, in Warsaw they have Israeli Counsel.

So he came from Warsaw by Volvo. Volvo, the consul, why shouldn't he? Then the president of the Jewish-- Geminder. The Jewish, they have still Jews in Krakow. I don't know how many-- came. And he came by in old car, an old jalopy. What was it? Not a Cadillac. What's that German popular care?

Mercedes Benz?

Mercedes. The Mercedes is maybe 35, 40 years old. When we sat down in the car, he could not start it. Each time he sat down to the car, the Poles were standing on the opposite side of the street and making remarks. You see, he comes by Mercedes, they go by Volvo. Just like this.

Mind you, there is no Jews in Poland anymore and they say the second generation, they are not Anti-Semites anymore. They hardly know about Jews. Those remarks, you see. So that was a pleasant experience too. And then of course, we went to solve our purpose, we went to ceremonies.

Saturday we went to Remu Shul. There is a famous Remu Shul there. But Remu was such a pious rabbi and such a popular one and so well respected by everybody, the Germans did not destroy that shul. So whoever comes-- and they renovated inside a little bit and my husband was in seventh heaven. He went, he got a [INAUDIBLE].

It's a small shul, but other than this, everything is falling apart, all the walls and everything. But it is like a nucleus. Whoever comes to Poland, even if they're not from Krakow, they go to Remu Shul. You know? So we went there, we spent half a day praying and the shul.

Poor Jews, old and sick, and they all crying just to give them money. It's unbelievable. It was so pitiful to see that. So we spoke to them and we helped them as little as we could and that was from then on we went to explore Krakow. We went to Plaszow, we went to the place where my husband's brother was killed. They sent him to the ditch there.

As a matter of fact, we had company last week -- my husband's brother's-- he got married in ghetto in Krakow and they

got killed there. So they were just a newly wed couple, they were very much in love, they knew how long they're going to be together. So the parents of my husband and the parents of his wife, they got together, they married them off, they made a little wedding.

And because my husband's brother was an architect, he still was going out outside the ghetto to work for Germans. They were putting up a building. So he was a prominent job and they would bring food to Plaszow. Somebody gave them up and when they were coming back from their job in the evening, the commandeer of the ghetto was standing by the gates of the ghetto.

There were 60 people working there and they went into that ditch and they shoot them all. While they were undressing, my husband's sister-in-law asked if she could give us a hug and a kiss to her husband. They killed them together. Yes. So he went to this place where his brother was killed, then we went to Plaszow.

There is no sign of the camp, that there was once a camp. There's no sign, just a very huge monument, very horrible one. In this and really five people, tall, big ones with their heads down. It's ugly, it's not pretty, but it's very huge so at least you can see it from far away. You can pay attention to it. That's all it is there.

So we were exploring. We went to Remu Shul, then we went to the Alta Shul. I went where my grandparents lived, where they had the store, where my other family lived. We went just to explore the city. My husband showed me where the ghetto is, where he lived in the ghetto.

Then we went to Auschwitz. Very hard day. But then I went to the barrack in which I was during the war and I said to my dear friend, how did we get out of this? I couldn't believe it. There Auschwitz is the only museum. There is one. And another one, of course, is Yad Vashem. I'm not talking about Israel now.

But this is the only significant museum that if we will be gone, if they will not destroy it, it will tell a lot. It's a lot of history there about our past. So we went to Auschwitz. There was Auschwitz and Birkenau. They were two different things, you know? So we first went to Auschwitz. We have slides, they have those exhibits there with the hair and with the shoes, with the dolls, with the toys, the replica of the camp.

They have the crematorium there that was bombed, but still you can see that. And then we bought a lot of books, a lot of slides, and then we went to Birkenau. Birkenau does not have much left, but it has the monument. It's not a mausoleum, but it is a row of monuments that combined in one but each country made that monument in one row attached to each other. Very nicely put, also history.

They have Italy there, they have Italy, they have France, they have a few countries I think. They have Belgium, Greece, and you know together, six of them. And then I went to my barrack. They don't have too many, they have just two left. And that was also for reasons, because they were supposed to make a movie or something so they left them as monument, but all others are destroyed.

They had the latrina there. I don't know if you know a latrina. This is where you went for physiological needs, a sink, you know? Really huge, they had just rows there. 600 of them. So this is left, and that is what is all Birkenau. Nothing else is left there. Mostly what you see is in Auschwitz, we spent the whole day there.

Then we went to my city, to Przemysl. So on the way we passed all kinds of towns which I did not know. I knew, but not physically. I didn't visit them, but we knew about them. Then I went to Przemysl, That was a terrible experience for me. Oh, I was so broken down that this Pole, this chauffeur, he came the following day to pick us to take us to Belzec.

He said to me, I did not sleep because of you the whole night. He said to me, I was talking to my wife about you. And he brought me a beautiful tablecloth. He didn't know what to do for me, you know? He was nice, so we were nice to him too. Even though he made good business with us, but really we did not care because he took us everywhere, whatever we wanted.

The places that we wanted to see, he was very much familiar with those places and he was like a bodyguard, which was



[INAUDIBLE]. We felt secure going with him. So then I went to Przemysl, I went to the house where I was born, to the school, I showed my husband, which I attended.

To the villa where my uncle lived and showed him the factory. I showed him the [INAUDIBLE] there. I showed him around the city. We went to the shul, we went to the Jewish cemetery. Everything was so terribly neglected. So terribly neglected. Unbelievable.

You told us what happened when you came to your house and there was someone living in your apartment.

Well, I came to my house. Yes, the street looks fairly good. But the house, I was standing by the house and just looking at the balcony and I said to the chauffeur I said, [Personal name] look, this is my balcony. He was [INAUDIBLE] under balcony. I used to live here, and the woman that was standing there took over that apartment.

So Michek, he felt sorry for me, so he said, you know, this lady used to live here before the war. So he said, no, she had to be an old woman because I live here already over 40 years. It's impossible she should live here. So I walked away. I didn't want to go even upstairs to see. I didn't go in into the villa.

When I saw that [INAUDIBLE] I run away. I got so scared, I was crying like a baby and I kept running. I developed such a fear, you know? And in a moment I said to my husband, you know what? I'm afraid she could send me a policeman and something could happen to us.

In other words, you felt yourself back there again.

Yes, yes, yes. I have [INAUDIBLE] I guess. I don't know. But it was very scary, it was a terrifying experience to see her because all my memories from childhood came back and how bad she was to us and sometimes I thought, if not because of her, maybe my family would still be alive. She didn't help them, she didn't help me, you know?

Because of her, they perished. Because we were in hiding, if they were she wouldn't give us up maybe we would survive. So anyway, it was a terrible experience, then an experience going to Belzec. There is no sign whatsoever. A way to Belzec, something. If not of the chauffeur, I don't think we could find it.

You don't see a soul, there is no people there. It's such a remote place. Did I told you before? I mentioned to you, I don't know how he could find that place. There is nothing there. Nothing. There is one small monument that says that "here perished 600 Jews and 1,500 Poles which helped the Jews."

And this is such a lie, because they were not there. There was nobody there. They brought them there by trains, they loaded them on the trucks which gassed them right away, and then they burned them. There was no Poles there at all. Another monument, a big one, a huge one, does not mention Jews at all. Not at all. And we decided, my husband, by coincidence-- we were just the two of us and the chauffeur.

By coincidence came another person from California, also a survivor of Holocaust. And we decided that we are going to do something about this place. We are going to, first of all. To clean it up because it's so neglected. It looks terrible. This is our cemetery, you know? This is the only one thing that we have. We don't have any stones, nothing, and that we are going to do something about it.

My husband is in charge of it and he's constantly in contact with this man in California and we decided that we're going to clean it up and maybe to make some monument out of it. So this was a sad experience. So sad. We were working there, like I would work on the graves. I would step on my family, you know?

And when he picked up that piece of bone, he thought this is human bone. That man from California, he comes there all the time. He said, you see? This still remains, piece of bone. What can I tell you? You can imagine how I felt-- you cannot imagine. Nobody can imagine, only somebody who went through it.

It's like if we blame our children, that they are not the way we would like them to be, that they will not [INAUDIBLE]

into history. You know? Our best and so on. You know what? I don't defend them, but I can also not blame them because nobody can understand if somebody suffers. Only if you go through it. It's very difficult to understand.

Every day was a book, everything-- what I told you, this is a fragment. It's a fragment of what I went through. With Auschwitz, those four months that I did, that was unbelievable. It was a nightmare to see the screaming we come by cars straight out of the barracks room and they screaming they take them straight into gas chambers. A few hours later, we saw the fire going dead and the smell of the bomb. You know? And it's terrible.

Every day they would call us, they would count us, they would send us, they would do something, they would torture you. Without food, without anything. It's unbelievable. And the stories, what personally you went through. They would catch this one, they would kill her, they would burn her, they would beat her up. You know? People that we knew.

It's difficult to bring in words even your feelings. Very difficult to put it in the words. And the books that are written and everything, but nothing-- I don't think that anything can describe the feelings. That's why-- is there a best seller and the Holocaust? Is there a book came out that is a bestseller?

Sophie's Choice.

Sophie's Choice. Well, Sophie's--

That was definitely this summer.

It was a Polish woman in the southeast? Yeah, so it wasn't so very significant to the truth. I mean, it was, but I think the strongest impact, I think, until now, in my opinion, I think is Annie Frank. Don't you think so?

There's a book now by the woman who saved that family. Yes.

Miep.

Miep Gies.

Yes. Yes, yes. The dutch lady.

I have a question I would like to ask you.

Yes?

When you began to tell us of your experiences, repeatedly you said you didn't want to live, that you wanted to end your life because you--

That was when they took me out of the bunker when they discovered me, yes.

Yes, and how you threw yourself from the train and so on. Somewhere along the line in what you have shared with us, it seemed as though your focus changed a little bit, as though somehow you found the determination to survive. How do you explain your survival?

Look my dear, I tell you something. When you are a young person, you go through torture, then when this passes by, life goes on again. Not that you forget it, but life goes on. Life goes on. And actually, what should I tell you? At that time, I did not want to live and that's why I jumped out of the train.

I was not told how to jump trains or it never occurred to me that I would be in a situation like this, I should prepare myself. Neither did I hear about something like that at home. But at that time I was sure that I am going to die. So I knew, that's why I was-- I'm telling you, there was the Gestapo here and I kneeled on my knees and I said please, [SPEAKING GERMAN].

I told them in German, I know that I'm going to die. I said, why do you have to take me by train to a place to die? I was begging him. He could shoot me right away. He did not, but he could. You see, at that time that was a terrifying experience.

But later on, life goes on. You're being thrown in this-- and I tell you another thing. We did not have time to think about anything. Things were changing so rapidly, so fast. You had no time. I was thrown here, I was in Plaszow for six months, every day was another experience.

Here they came, they took away all the children from Plaszow. One day they made an Appell because there, it was in the beginning, like a family camp. And so parents with children, if you had acquaintances, if you had money, you could still pay your way for a while to keep the children in the camp.

But then the Germans found out, they made an Appell they gathered us all on the place. They went into barracks, took out all the children, loaded them on the trucks, took them to Auschwitz. While they were loading them and while they were going out of the ghetto, the music was playing. You could get crazy German music.

We were all under Appell all the grown-ups-- I mean, teenagers, us-- and hear the children crying, crying mommy, mommy and music. And that's how they left everything was with music. And this was happening all the time, something every day. Here they found outside the ghetto, three Jews. They caught them, they brought them into Plaszow, they hung them.

What did they do? They made an Appell. we had to stay and to witness all this every single day. We had no time even to think because every day was a chapter by itself. So it was not even a question of thinking of being alive. You know? They disdained our life every minute, so who was thinking about living or something? I did not.

To the last minute I did not believe that I'm going to be alive and it wasn't that I did something to be alive. We couldn't do even if we wanted to. We couldn't do anything. It was not in our power to do it. Things were happening for us. So I don't know how to answer your question. It was not the will to live, really. It was not. It was just, things were happening.

But when you were in a situation when you were getting taken out of the bunker and you see the head of a Gestapo-- I saw his head, I fainted. And they take you out and they load you on this place, you know, on this gathering place and they treat you like cattle and they beat you up and they harass you and you have to run.

And then so at that time, I really did not-- I wanted he should shoot me and I was begging him to do it. And then what motivated me to jump was when the train started to roll and when the women started to cry and the children and there was no water and nothing. When I heard that, I thought that I'm going to get crazy.

So that's when I decided that I'm going to jump out and kill myself too. I tell you another fragment. Before we left for the Plaszow in 1944, that was in January, I told you 15 women, we thought that we are digging the graves for us but we were sent instead to Plaszow. We all had [INAUDIBLE], all of us. We had that poison.

You know what [INAUDIBLE] is? One woman took [INAUDIBLE] and I was witnessing how she was dying. She died, took a few minutes. I witnessed when she took it, when she was falling in a daze the foam started to come out of her mouth and then she closed her eyes and that's it. We wanted to do it to take it, but I don't know, we did not.

This woman would survive because all the 15 women that went to Plaszow, we all survived except for her. And she was older than us. She was married. Her husband survived after the war, he remarried. He died not long ago. He lived in Asbury Park.

You see, it was such a complex situation. But believe me, I don't know. I speak for myself. I don't think that I cared to do it, and I did not do anything. It was just the situation. It was just that things that were happening.

Ilona, we only have a few more minutes if I can ask you one final question.

Yes.

I know it's unfair, almost, of me to ask you this in such a short time, but what do you think is the most important thing that you've taken away from your experience in the Holocaust? What do you carry with you now that really means more to you from that time than anything else?

I tell you, I feel, I hope that people will change. That maybe someday we are going to live in a different world, in a better world, our children. It's too late for us, but that our children will have a better world. That people will start to realize what life is about and they should care about each other and they should love each other because there is nothing more beautiful in life than caring.

Thank you very much.

You're welcome.