[MUSIC PLAYING] Good afternoon. My name is Bernard Weinstein, and I'm the director of the Kean College Oral Testimonies Project at the Holocaust Resource Center. We are affiliated with the Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. Sharing the interview with me is Nancy Kislin, and we are privileged to welcome Lauryann Friedman, 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. Friedman, we would love to welcome you here.

Thank you.

And I'd like to begin by asking you to tell us a little bit about the early life and where you grew up.

Well, my earliest recollection takes me back to a very small town in the northeast part of Hungary where a large part of my family lived on my mother's side. On my father's side, they were in France. And this little town called GyulahÃ¡za, about 28 kilometer from the Russian border today-- three sister got married into the same little town-- my grandmother and her two sisters-- and they raised their families and children and grandchildren. And this is where I remember my earliest time, all the way to age four, I would say. Perhaps even before, because I was born in France, but we came to visit. And the farm life and the chickens and the ducks and the geese fascinated me as a tiny, little toddler, in that I remember the sound of the farm and family around me.

Was that your earliest memory?

I can even recall the Paris subway as a child and the noise it created, the vibration it created, and the smell of the subway, the MÃ©tro in Paris. I think that is really the furthest I can go back in my memory. It impressed me very much.

So you knew a little bit of the life in a large city, and you also knew the life on a rural farm?

Very little of the large city. But then we moved to Hungary due to the fact that my father had asthma, and the doctor recommended a change of climate. And my mother felt that if he had to go anywhere, then let's make a change of climate by going back to the old nest where her mother and brothers and the whole family lived. And this is how we happened to go back from France to Hungary.

Were the first years happy years for you?

Very happy years-- warm, happy years with lots of aunts and uncles and a loving grandmother. And I was an only child and always following my mother and grandmother, whatever, to see what was happening. I was very much part of everything. I was, I think, very much loved. And half a century later, I still feel that love.

How did your father earn his living?

He was an engineer. After World War I, he moved to France and moved his widowed mother, a younger brother, and sister to Paris. And he worked for different car manufacturers. At one point, he worked for Citroen, and then with Renault. Now, I don't in a chronological way which one was first. And from there, he was sent to Czechoslovakia, to Skoda, to demonstrate a machine that apparently the factory he worked for sold to Skoda, which also manufactured cars. And he was sent to demonstrate this machine and teach to people how to use it.

And on that trip, he was on a train, and he met a gentleman who he became friendly with. And because it was Friday, this gentleman, who was a religious Jew and didn't know that my father wasn't or what was he, and when he discovered he was Jewish but he really didn't look it, he invited him to go home and spend the weekend and not travel on the Shabbat. And I imagine coming all the way from Paris, already reaching Hungary, he must have been tired, my father. And he accepted, because he was not someone who would accept an invitation to a strange family very easily. And this is how he met my mother.

And it was the Shabbat, as they knew it. Everything stopped for the Shabbat. And the men went to synagogue. And on Sunday morning, he continued his trip. And he found a very warm family life that even that one little day of the Shabbat must have impressed him, because he wrote back postcards thanking the family for their warm hospitality. And he wrote letters once he went back to Paris, how he recalls with pleasure this short time he spent with the Klein family.

And at one point, my grandmother said to my mother, we must answer this gentleman. He shouldn't think that we are illiterate. He lives in Paris, and he was so much more sophisticated that she felt she had to justify that we acknowledge your letters. And my mother was assigned this task to write to him. And she wrote in the name of my grandmother, who signed the letter but then she added, and the greetings from me also, Serena.

The next letter was addressed to Serena Klein. And this correspondence went on for six years. He has asked her hand in marriage many times, but she was refused because he was not a religious man, and he came from a far away country, this little town--

So in all of this time, they didn't see each other. The courtship was entirely--

They never saw each other for six years.

--conducted through letters.

But my mother was 22 when she met him, and now she was 28. And all the gentlemen that they proposed in marriage, she refused. And my grandmother said, well, there is nothing I can do. She said, it's only him and no one else. So one of my uncle finally packed up with her, and they went to Paris to-- that she got married there. She was not very happy about the idea that she had to leave her mother-- widowed mother-- and family. Especially, she never was further than 10 kilometer before that time. So she really undertook a tremendous change in her life, not even knowing very well the man she was going to marry. And once she arrived in Paris, they got married. And they remained there, and I was born about a year later. And it was a very happy marriage.

As you were growing up, did you have many friends of your own age?

In this small town?

In the small town, yeah.

I went to school there till age 10. There were two schools, because there were two churches-- the Protestant church and the Catholic church. And there was one school that went up to grade four. And the fifth grade and the sixth grade, which was still a compulsory education, had to be-- we had to go to a school-- either to a Catholic or the Protestant school. So the fifth grade, I was started in the Catholic school. And I had lots of friends. I especially searched out friends because I was an only child. And I had lots of cousins, but they were older than myself. I had a beloved cat, as an only child should have.

What was the religious life like in your house?

It was orthodox, very much orthodox-- kosher home. Shabbat started already on Thursday when the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] came from a nearby town. I don't know if you know what [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] is-- someone who prepares the animal who is only allowed to kill an animal. And of course, already Thursday, we wouldn't let out the goose or the chicken that we wanted to be slaughtered for the Shabbat. And usually, that lasted for the week too. And already baking was being prepared Thursday night, because it was baked on Friday very early-- bread and cakes and cookies and everything. What we call here Danish was something very much on the menu every week. And they baked the bread for the whole week. And everything had to be done before the Shabbat would arrive on Friday.

So in that strict, very much defined atmosphere, I thrived. I was looking forward to, from week to week, to the preparation for Shabbat. And because it was very much defined, there was no question about it that what we do-- it was a very structured life and repetitious from week to week, because the Shabbat guided the behaviors and work schedule for everybody.

What was the Jewish community like in your town? Was it a large community?

All religious. The whole town was a small town, about 2,000 people all together, one main road, and no doctor in the town, no electricity, no running water indoor. The Jewish people were very much integrated with the town people and friends, because they lived there for generations. It was a harmonious life. If there was anti-Semitism, I would not have known about it. It was very-- mutual respect. The Jewish people were either-- they had a store of dry goods or things that they could not themselves grow, which was very few items-- spices for instance, or a yard goods for clothing. Other than that, most everything was grown at home, very much like in our own colonial times in America.

When you were attending Catholic school, was there any attempt to proselytize you?

Not at all. The sanctuary was closed off, and the blackboard was pulled down, so it became a classroom. And once a week, the priest came to instruct catechism and religion, and I, myself, with another young boy of my own age, we were the only two Jewish children in the class. And we were allowed to go in the very last row of the classroom during that religious instruction period and do whatever we wished, as long as we were quiet. We usually did our homework for the following day or read ahead in our book that we had with us, especially in the winter. And the winter is long in Hungary. So in the summer, we could go out in the yard and play.

But as children always do what they don't have to, I was listening intently to the instruction, because to me it was very interesting, and I found it almost fairy tale like as some of the stories. And whenever someone didn't know the answer in the classroom, the priest-- I realized this later that he shamed them by calling on us. He would say, I bet that little Jewish girl in the back there would know. And that was the first time I was tagged. And that made me very proud, because with my Jewishness, I was told that I am smart enough to know.

So you felt special, but not isolated.

I felt special by the fact that I was sought out, that I bet she would know, this little Jewish girl. And of course, I knew. One of the questions that I vividly remember, because later it came back to me that it was interesting-- the question was asked, why do we celebrate Sunday instead of the Sabbath day as the holiday? And no children of my classmates knew it. And the priest said, all right, that little Jewish girl will know there. And of course, he called on me, and I stood up, and I said, it's to distinguish ourselves from the Jews. In other words, this is what the answer was that he was hoping to hear from his class, but no one knew the answer. So he called on me, but I turned the phrase in a way that he wanted to hear it. And of course--

Using the first person rather than the third person.

That's right. I knew that he didn't want to hear it from my point of view. We celebrated the Shabbat. There was no question in my mind. But what he was teaching and the children didn't know how to answer, this was the answer. And I gave the answer as he wanted to hear it. And later, I told my parents about it. They said, well, that's very good, but you celebrate Shabbat. I said, I know that, but he knows that too. He was asking the question from his class, and this is how I had to answer if I wanted to please him.

So you knew even--

To distinguish ourselves from the Jews, we celebrate Sunday instead of Saturday.

Yeah. So you knew even then that there was an implicit pressure to be kind.

Oh, I was very aware of being Jewish but I was very proud of it.

Yeah.

I was brought up in a very small, little cocoon among Jewish people who believed that they were better. And I believed we were better, because they had an extra education through the Talmud Torah. And we had ethics that we lived by that

I believed that certain things were better-- the respect you gave to each other or something else. The holidays we observed guided us in certain pre-ordained fashion. And I felt it did make-- gave us an extra dose of being better and knowing more.

When did things begin to change for you and your family?

Things began to change in 1938, when I didn't even know there was a war. I heard grown-ups discuss all kinds of stories, but I didn't read that part of the newspaper. There was a page for children, and that's all interested me. There were stories in the newspaper that on one page only for children, so that was my literature as far as the newspaper.

In '38, a lot of the Hungarians have enlisted themselves with a group of German-- people who were paid by Germans to wear a uniform. This was a Hungarian group that was monied by Germany, which I found out later. And a lot of local young men who had nothing much to do and who were not very educated joined this group. In term, they were probably paid some money, but they wore a uniform, and that allowed them to be-- it gave them a certain-- it lifted them out of their peasant state. They were in uniform. They felt they belonged to a certain elite.

And they wear German uniforms, or--

It was a different uniform. It was not a German uniform, but a uniform nevertheless. Arrow Cross, it was called.

What did it symbolize?

It symbolized siding with the German behavior, that they could raid a town and hold up anybody with a gun which they carried or shoot anybody. They were like marauding bandits centuries before, but this time, these were young people who had no jobs or didn't get to be like their parents at home. And they felt that this gave them an extra identity.

Did they target particular groups?

Pardon me?

Did they target particular groups like Jews, or--

Jews. Jewish people.

Others too, or just Jews?

Just Jews. Just Jews. And that begin in 1938-- the Arrow Cross movement, which started somewhere in Budapest with a man named-- I think his name was SzÃ¡lasi. I'm not quite sure, but this can be documented. And this group of people, sometime you heard that in a neighboring town, middle of the night, they would start shooting and asking a shopkeeper to open the store. And they would take whatever they wanted until-- I have never heard of anybody being bodily harmed, but they made a lot of noise with their guns, like children. They were playing the superiority, because the gun allowed them.

And in 1938, my father was better, so he went to Budapest and found a job with a corporation that made small parts for airplanes. This was called the First Hungarian Airplane Parts Factory, and the owners were called Marx and [? Mireil. ?] This was the owner's name. I have a sheet of paper that I have found after the war in the basement where everything was shoved addressed to my father in their handwriting and their letterhead. At one point, my father wasn't feeling well, and this gentleman, the owner, wrote to him, we hope you'll feel better soon and you'll rejoin us.

So he went to Budapest, and we were to follow, my mother and I, as soon as he found an apartment for us. And all our belongings were packed up. And by then, things were beginning to heat up with this group of people who used their newly found power with their uniform and their gun. And one night, my mother and I, we were afraid to go to sleep in our home, because she said if they would come to knock on our door, they would find that there is no men in the house. We would be in trouble. Now what trouble she meant, I had no idea, but we decided to spend the night just walking on the street. My mother took a piece of wood like a cane, and we walked to my grandmother's house in the middle of the night to spend the night there so we should not be alone in case they would knock on our door.

And we heard gunshots on the other side of town, and somebody who was walking at night said they broke into the local bar-- as you would call a bar, which was really, people went there to get a glass of wine and to talk-- men. This local bar belonged to a cousin of my mother-- first cousin. She was a widow. She had one son. And so we were very worried whatever happened to her, because they said that that's where the gunshot came from. It turned out the following day we found out that they just wanted to be served wine, and they were rowdy, and they were drunk. But no one came to harm. They just shot in the air, just made a lot of noise.

But by this time, were they already beating people? Were they already [INTERPOSING VOICES]?

No, not yet, not yet. They were just exercising their trigger fingers. And I guess they were feeling how far can we go? Can we get what we want without killing anybody or just shooting in the air will all already give us what we want? This was the first time that trouble really began. Then we moved to Ãšjpest, which is a suburb of Budapest, where I went to the local school, and we remained there until 1944.

The Germans marched in March 19, 1944. And until then, we were pretty much at peace. Nobody really pointed finger at us. I remember going with my mother to the nearby synagogue where we had to order the matzah for Passover, and I went with her to help her carry it home. And we kept very much in correspondence with our family back in this little town. So this was the last holiday I spent with my parents.

This must be--

Passover 1944. And from March 19, things got very rapidly accelerated. Day after day, there were new posters on the street what Jews cannot do. The baby is not allowed to get milk. Jews are not allowed to get flour, butter, oil. Every day, more and more restriction. Finally, on-- just to show you how fast things moved on from March until May-- by May, we were told we cannot go out-- only a certain time of the day. And then a new restriction came. And we were bombed already. There were bombings, and we had to go down to the bunker, which they call it, underground.

A very interesting thing I remember from this time-- everybody from this building who lived there was assigned a period when you have to be on duty in order to alert the people who were sleeping if there was a raid, an air raid, and everybody had to get up and go down to the basement. And my father was assigned this duty. And I begged him that I could be with him. He had a certain number of hours he had to fulfill his duty as a citizen. And it's one of my happiest memories that I spent with my-- one of the last time when I was with my father, in the middle of the night. Our task was to be alert. And if you hear an air raid, you have to ring a gong so that everybody should wake up and go to the basement.

And it was a quiet night. Nothing happened. But it allowed me to have a long conversation with my father about the stars. And he pointed out which was what star and how to follow and find all the-- and he knew all the names, which fascinated me-- all the Cassiopeia or whatever. And I still remember today that starry night that I spent with my father.

Were your parents talking about-- were people talking about what to do to leave, to go somewhere?

I think we were very ignorant about what was happening elsewhere, which happened much before. It seemed like it was a great wall built between those who knew something, and even if they told, nobody would have believed such atrocities. Soldiers who were in the army came back with stories, but we were reluctant even to-- we said, this cannot be true. Did you hear this or did you witness it? They say, no, they have heard. They are meeting other soldiers. And we said, they must exaggerate. There is no such thing. It's not possible. You see, they might have met somebody from Poland, but we were so far removed.

And news didn't travel very well. People didn't move around. After a while, there was nobody to move around. Everybody was wiped out from the countryside. Everybody was taken away in April already. This little town I was talking about-- they were all taken away in April, and we had no news. Now, when the Germans marched in March 19, everything was turned upside down. If we didn't hear news, it's because the Germans were moving eastward to the Russian front. Therefore, we understood that trains were for their use, that mail wouldn't go through because the Germans were moving on to the Eastern Front. And that was the reason we didn't hear. We never imagined anything else.

Did you know what happened to your grandmother?

No. My grandmother was buried. She died when I was 10 years old. And from this town, Ãšjpest, I went for the summer to spend the summer with her. It was the first time I traveled alone. I was put in a train by my parents, and awaited at my destination, which was a long trip-- 24 hours you had to spend on a train. It really went very slow. It had to practically travel across all of Hungary.

And that summer, one day, she didn't feel like getting up in the morning, which was an unusual sign from her. And she was saying, especially because I was there, she would have liked to get up. She felt tired. She was in her 80s. But up until then, she never was ill, and she was the first to get up of the household, feed the chicken and whatnot, the geese, and carry on her chores as usual. That one day, she said she was too tired to get up. And they called the doctor. And the doctor said, well, she should just stay in bed for a period of rest. Remember, the doctor had to come by horse and buggy from another town. And there was no telephone-- only at the post office. So somebody had to go and get the doctor by horse and buggy. And the doctor said she should stay in bed. He couldn't find anything in particular, but if she doesn't feel well, just rest. And within a couple of hours, she was dead.

Up until that time, that was the greatest tragedy that hit me, because I adored that grandmother. I had a very special attachment to her. And I was just heartbroken. And of course, my mother came to the funeral. And they did not allow me to go with the procession to the little cemetery which was at the end of the main road, and I felt very bad about that. I was left out of something that had to do with my grandmother. And even today, I feel very pulled back to that cemetery.

So as I said, the communications were interrupted, and we understood it was because of the eastward marching Germans. And of course, when we heard the German troops on-- they were everywhere. And when we saw them marching, singing on the street at all hours, it was frightening to me, because I felt overwhelmed by their presence-- a presence that I did not understand the why. And their language was different. I felt there could not be any communications if I ever found myself facing with one of them. They looked like very well-dressed army and handsome young men. I was at the time 15 years old, so I just looked from the corner of my eyes and observed rather than participated in anything that went on.

And shortly after, we were told that all Jewish people had to move into a specifically designated house. Leave everything behind. Just take the clothing that you think you need, because there's no place to move. You will be assigned the size of a bed to be your place. And there will be other families in the same apartment. And this is what happened before we had to move to another place.

We happened to know the landlord of this building, and she was there with the-- she was a widow, and she had two grown son in the army. And these two sons brought back very strange stories that were whispered between grown-ups and not quite understood by anybody what was the meaning of it, or was it truly the way it was, whatever they were talking about. And I don't think we lived more than two, three weeks in this place. But again, there were other children, other young people, teenagers.

But every day, new rules came. We were not allowed to walk on the sidewalk. We were not allowed to walk out after 5 o'clock. And we were guarded by Hungarian soldiers that we should obey the rules. Every building in Hungary where there are more than one family lives, it is so that there is an inner courtyard. And we were able to be in the courtyard, but we could not go out after certain hours.

Getting back for a moment to the things that were whispered, did you know at the time what they were saying, or did you get a glimmer of it, or--

Forced labor. It didn't mean a thing to me. What is forced labor? Forced labor and labor camps. These were the key words that I can recall. And since I didn't understand and no one really-- I didn't ask questions, because I felt if anything I should know, my parents would tell me.

Nothing about crematoria, nothing about death camps?

Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Nothing. And of course, we didn't get any mail from my family from the other part of the country, but that was-- it was almost self-explained by the family that, well, how can you expect anything? All the railroad tracks are used by the Germans. This was a big push eastward. They had signed-- this I know about that-- Hungary and Germany signed a pact in which that they will not attack each other in return for allowing the Germans go through Hungary to the Eastern border, the Eastern Front.

And of course, what I guess Hungary did not foresaw was that not only did they march through Hungary, but they also remained in Hungary. And of course, they needed all the food that they could use. An army needed to be fed. And so everything got tighter and tighter for everybody, but especially, of course, the new laws that came day after day. And this SzÃ¡lasi-- whatever his name was-- SzÃ¡lasi-- he became a very big leader of pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic. And he actually came to power at that time. And the army that already was close then and paid by the Germans.

During this time, were you allowed on the streets, or did you have to stay indoors, or what was your life like from day to day?

No, during the day we were allowed to move as we wished. And as a matter of fact, I went to school every day to Budapest. I took a tramway. Is that called tramway where you have the electricity that [INTERPOSING VOICES]

Trolleys.

Trolleys. Yes. I had a student identification, my picture on it, and I went to art school in Budapest. But I have to add, it was a private art school, because for years before already-- this was something that I should mention-- Jewish children were not accepted in higher education. I could not continue after four years of high school. And it was this middle school that that was called-- first four years after age 12, you were not allowed to go into higher education and upper schools. And I was very unhappy, because I loved school. I loved everything about it. That's where I found companionship of children of my own age. And I was a good student.

Did you want to be an artist?

I wanted to be a teacher. I could not get into a school for teachers. I couldn't continue. There was a Jewish teacher school, but that was quite far from Budapest. And being an only child, my father said, if I had six daughters, I would let one to be an intern in a school 500 kilometer from here. I only have you. How can we let you go? Then I thought, all right, I'll go to a commercial school. I always wanted to be a writer or a teacher. I love children, natural. I was alone. All children attracted me. And I would have been a good teacher. I couldn't make it.

So my father, as a compensation, knew a gentleman who was French who had a private art school. And he called him up and spoke with him, and that's where I went to school. This was private and most of the young girls were there really too, because they too couldn't go into any further education. If you were not in school and you were not working, you had to be in a public service. You had to go to a certain place every day and clean streets or whatever as a group of young girls or boys who were not in school or not employed.

And in order to avoid that, a lot of people could afford to put their children into private schools, searched out some ways to have them in a school. So here in this school, I have met young girls who were older than myself, young boys who were older. It was a good school, but it was not a state school. And I was going to school every day to the very last minute until we were told now we were going to be taken to a brick factory and transported into a labor camp where families will stay together. This was the key issue-- families will stay together.

You take whatever you wear and what is most important to you in as small a suitcase as possible. You won't need anything. You will be working, staying together, and you will be given food and shelter. Well, my father said the war can not last very long and it won't be for long, so don't feel too bad. And he also believed that once he would be outside of Hungary, speaking several languages, he could find his way away from any labor camp. But he never imagined the organizations that the Germans had put into this or whatever we were to find, because no one could imagine such a devious way of thinking that this could be accomplished.

What did you do in the labor camp?

We were not in a labor camp.

I mean, the brick factory.

Oh, that was just us overnight, or over two, three nights stay until we could get into the wagons. You see, wagons came every day. And I remember, we were fighting to get on the wagon because it was raining, and we were sleeping outdoor on top of bricks in outdoor. And it was devastating. There was no toilet facilities. That's the first time I heard the word latrine. We had no food with us. So our goal was to get out of there as fast as possible.

My mother caught a very bad sore throat. And rain, shine, night, day, we were in the same place.

So from a standpoint of physical suffering, this was the worst that you had yet experienced up to that point.

This was the worst. This was the worst of worst to come. But I was still with my parents.

Any other members of your family with you at this time?

No. No. Any other family I had were back in that town, so I thought. But I didn't know at the time-- I only found out later that they were taken away, everybody-- children, old people, my two sisters of my grandmother, and all their family. And they were already well into their 70s.

Prior to your own leaving.

That's right. That's right. The countryside was cleaned out systematically first before they would come to Budapest and its suburbs. And we never heard of Wallenberg, who was operating in Budapest and trying to save people. We had never heard of safe houses and embassies where one could hide. There was a certain isolation of news, you see, and it couldn't take too many people anyway.

Where did the wagons take you when the wagons came?

In my case, the wagons took me to Auschwitz with my parents, and that's the last I saw of them. But prior to that, I have to tell-- I recall a story that will be perhaps of interest to you. Catholic priests came to ask a lot of people-- ask people to convert, and that if they would convert, they would make sure that they would not be taken away, which is false, because the Germans demanded papers to prove that you were an Aryan some six generation before and that your great-great-great-grandfather served in such and such an army. And most people didn't have such papers, and that's why they demanded these.

So a lot of people converted. They thought that that would be their savior-- salvation. And when the priest came to us, we of course-- we had no interest in converting. But my father said, but my daughter is not even Hungarian. She was born in France. She has no Hungarian citizenship, and it is unfair that something should happen to her. And the priest was very much interested in that. And he said, do you have her birth certificate? And of course, there it was. And Hungarians put the religion into every birth certificate. French never did.

So he says, where does it say that she is Jewish? And my father said, in France, they never ask that. It's not a customary thing to write in your birth certificate. And then this priest said, then leave her with us, and she will not be harmed, because there is no proof that she's Jewish. And I was told that I didn't look it I didn't look Jewish, whatever that meant.

And my father turned to me says, would you like to stay here until we come back? And I wouldn't hear of it. Wherever my parents were to be, I was going to be.

And now my mother had a sore throat there, and I felt that she needed my help and care. I was very, very attached to my parents, as only an only child can be, and I said, there's no question. I was almost insulted to be asked. And my father said, well, it won't be for long. I said no, no way. And of course, that's how we got onto the first possible transportation that we could from to get out of this horrible situation. There were hundreds and hundreds and thousands of people-- I don't know how many-- under the worst circumstances, all thrown together outside, outdoor. And we felt that we had to get out of this situation. We can't stay another night here sleeping outdoor.

It was just one night that you were out there, that you were--

I remember just one night. And as I say as soon as-- and when the wagons came empty, everybody stormed the wagon to get into it and go somewhere, because we were going to be housed somewhere and not be on the outside. And of course, we had very little food with us. My father had some pate that had to be opened with a can opener. And I don't know, I said, it is not kosher. I can't eat that. And my father said to me, no, you have to forget about that. You have to eat whatever there is to have, and God will forgive you. And I could hardly swallow.

And being in the wagon with old people, children, dying people, just about-- it was absolutely horrible. It was all closed and high up there was a little opening with heavy, thick gates on the little window. He was very tall, my father. Small as I am, he was very tall. And he was chosen to be the one who, when the wagon stopped, when the train stopped, to go out to get a bucket of clean water for drinking purposes, empty the bucket that was in our wagon for elimination.

And my mother said to me, you know, your father could just leave if he wanted to. Perhaps he could hide out somewhere. But he never even thought about that. He really believed that there was some way to escape once he's over the border of Hungary. So this is how we arrived in Auschwitz.

How long was the trip?

I really can't recall if it was two days or three days. Once we arrived, everything happened like lightning. Some people just fell out. Dead people were pushed out. People died on the way-- old people. Children were practically crushed. Raus, raus, raus-- I never heard such noises before-- the German soldiers with dogs. And it was somewhat late afternoon that we arrived. It was already getting to be a little darker than midday.

And immediately, we were shoved and pushed, men in this column and women here. And I was with my mother, and then I watched the men march away. My father was, as I say, very tall. I remember this is my last recollection of my father. He was wearing an overcoat. It was still spring, cool. And as he adjusted his collar in the back of his neck, he was very straight and above the crowd in height. And I saw him for a long time while we were marched and shoved and pushed. And my mother was next to me holding my hand.

Then at that point, we arrived, and there was this man who just made gestures of this way and that way. And I was told to go to the right. And from that point, I didn't see my mother. The crowd behind her swallowed her. She was small like I am, and I could not see her anymore.

So you were with-- you had been with your mother, and your father was in an earlier group, is that it? He went first?

When we got out of the wagon, immediately, men were separated. Men should stand up in this group and women this way. So the moment we stepped out of that wagon, the moment we reached the platform, we were marched in different column. And that's how I remember looking at the column of the men marching away, being shoved, pushed, fast, fast, fast. And I remember seeing my father from the back as he adjusted his collar.

Then I got caught up with what I was facing, my mother next to me who was about my height at that time. And then she was literally torn away from my side. I couldn't see her. Two minutes later, the crowd covered her, and I could not see her anymore. And I felt utterly, utterly lost. And there was not a minute to think of what-- you were marched. You were caught up in the movement of people.

Did you realize that would be the last time?

No. No. When I looked around, I saw behind barbed wires. This was the road between two camps. On both sides, there were people, and they were looking haggard, and they had no hair. They were burned from the sun. Their eyes were piercing, lifeless. And I had no one to talk to, really. I didn't know anybody that was marching next to me. But I, in my mind, thought, maybe this is an insane asylum. These people didn't look normal.

How were they dressed?

Most of them were dressed in striped uniforms, but they had no hair. I couldn't even tell if they were men or women. And some of them were so emaciated that I never saw bones move. I studied human anatomy in order to draw, and suddenly, I saw the anatomy books in front of me, but these people were walking like the skeletons I studied. I couldn't imagine where I was and who they were.

And the language-- most of the language I didn't understand. I still don't know if they were Polish or other nationality because I didn't even caught the sound of what they were talking. And they were asking for things. Their hand was out. I think they thought we had food.

Were they behind barbed wire, or were they open in the--

Behind barbed wire, and far from the barbed wire, a distance away. Nobody was holding on and looking out. Later, I knew why-- electricity was on. And we arrived into an empty barrack, and we slept on the floor that night. A lot of people went out of their mind. People woke up in the middle of the night, wanted to go to the bathroom and stepped on somebody else. There was no light. Outside they were shooting and dogs barking. Total disorientation.

This was already after we were, of course, marched through the worst of being shaved and our clothes left behind and given some horrible smelling old clothes that didn't fit nobody. Nobody was getting what their size was. So it was a horrible sight of total dehumanization. And you looked at other people who had no hair, so that we were all shaved, but you never saw yourself, what you looked like.

And you still didn't know what was happening there?

No. absolutely not.

We have to pause at this moment. We'll continue.