

Good morning. Good morning, I am Joseph Preil, Director of the Holocaust Resource Center here at King College of New Jersey. This morning December 16th, 1993, the eighth day of Hanukkah, we are privileged to have with us Mrs. Celina Rosenblum, a resident of Clifton, who will tell us about her experiences in World War two when she was a young girl in Poland. Mrs. Rosenblum to begin with, tell us which members of your immediate family were alive in Poland at the beginning of the war?

My parents.

Your parents.

My parents, my brother.

So there were four of you?

There were four of us, yes.

And you survived?

Yes, with my mother.

Both you and your mother survived. And of your extended family, which would mean grandparents, uncles, aunts, and first cousins, how many were there?

My grandparents did not survive.

How many grandparents were alive in 39?

I had three.

Three.

Yes. And my mother had two brothers, and one survived. My father had a sister and three brothers, which one brother survived. He was in Russia during the war.

How many of the uncles and aunts were married?

All of them except one. No, no, all of them, all of them.

You had six uncles and aunts.

Yes.

Five spouses. That's 11.

No I had six spouses. I remember he just married just before the war.

So they were all married?

Yes, they were all married.

So there were 6 and 6 are 12. And 3 grandparents. 15.

Right. Yes, yes.

12, 15 and how many first cousins?

How many? Three. I think five.

There were five children. So that's 20. To 3 and 12, 6 and 6, and 5 gives you 20. Of the 20, how many survived?

How many survived? The two brothers and one cousin.

So three out of those 20 survived. Now if we put your four people in your immediate family, five out of 24 survived?

Right.

All right. Let us begin from the beginning. When and where were you born?

I was born in Krakow on December 23, 1929.

So you were just about 10 years old-- close to 10 years old when the war began?

Right.

Tell us about life in Krakow and your family before the war.

Well, my parents had a furniture store in Krakow. And I had a very wonderful childhood. I went to Hebrew school. Not after the school, I mean, it was a whole day outside of piano lessons and dancing lessons. And we were quite well off. We were a wonderful family. And that's all I remember now.

So the only school you went to was Hebrew school?

Yes, yes.

You had general studies there too?

Yes.

I see. And your brother was how old?

He was only five. And in Europe, you didn't really start school till you were seven.

So he didn't begin school?

No, no. He only was taking piano lessons and doing absolutely wonderful.

All right, tell us what happened, what you recall of events beginning in September '39?

No. September 1, the war broke out. In the morning, we woke up, and we heard shooting. We didn't realize what really was happening, but then everybody realized what happened. And we were hiding in the basement until all the bombing stopped. And then the war continues. My parents decided that we were going to leave Krakow.

We hired a taxi, and we went to a certain point. I don't remember where it was. And the taxi just left us there. And we were going and going on horse and carriages loaded with ammunition. We were traveling with the Polish army.

Let's understand. Who was in the taxi? You, your brother, and two parents.

And my parents. Right.

Four people. Now, where did the Polish army come into the picture here?

Because the taxi left us right in the middle of nowhere. And we had to go. There were no gasoline. There was nothing. We wanted to go towards Russia. And the Polish army was traveling obviously in that direction. So we were sitting on top of the ammunition and traveling with them all for maybe a few days.

And they allowed you to go with them?

Yes, they did. Yes. There was a lot of people.

A lot of people were running away and doing the same thing.

Yes, yes, yes. Finally somehow we reached the city of Lvov. And there were Russians there. And we stayed there for quite some time, I remember. And then my grandparents decided and my parents that we should go back.

Now Lvov, that's also it was known then as Lemberg?

Right. That's right.

That was in the Russian section of Poland?

Yes, yes. And we were there for a few months. I don't know exactly how many months. Then we decided-- my parents decided that we were going to go back. And my grandparents paid a fortune to a man to bring us back to Krakow which was a big mistake because we should have gone to Russia. But that was the way it was. And we were going through snow up to the waist. Going through the border. We reached Krakow after a few days walking in the snow.

Do you have any idea of the date, about what time this was?

It was in the winter. It was probably in 1940. It was in the winter of 1940.

A year after the war began.

Yeah. Because the war began in '39 of September. So this was that year.

A year plus?

No it was not the year. It wasn't even the year.

Oh, was that same the winter of '39, '40, just a few months after the war began?

'40, right, right. Exactly. And we came back, and we stayed with my grandmother because our apartment was taken over by a German by the name of Mr Frank. He was, I think, the governor of Krakow. And he liked our apartment because it was beautifully furnished, and he took it over. And since then, we never could go back. And we stayed with my grandmother until they were starting to talk about a ghetto being formed.

This is in the winter of 40.

This was the winter of 40. But we did not go to ghetto. We packed up our things. My grandmother and my mother's brothers, both of them, we went through Wieliczka.

You were very good at spelling earlier.

Yes.

Can you spell this one for me.

Yes, yes.

Oh, that's wonderful. OK, how do you spell it?

W-I-E-L-I-C-Z-K-A.

All right. I have it.

OK. And we stayed. We lived there in the very communal life. One house was maybe was 20 families. Each family had a room and a kitchen that's quite a few families used, which was my mother's brother and her mother, which was great.

So it was all family?

For us, it was all family. Then it had to be Judenrein, right? This must have been the beginning of 1943 or the end of 1942, because we went to ghetto in Krakow. And we lived there in such horrible conditions that is unbelievable. But then we were broke. Everything was taken away from us.

And my father was taken away at that point too. He went to Stalowa Wola. And we stayed in the ghetto until March of 1943.

But you are Wieliczka in the first winter of the war.

Right.

And how long were you in Wieliczka? Would you say?

Till sometimes in 42.

All right. So you were there from-- that was at least two years. Because you came to Wieliczka at the beginning of 40.

Right.

At the beginning of winter.

We were there long time. Yes, yes.

So were in Wieliczka a long time?

Yes. I am not sure if it was two years, but it was quite some time.

Then you came back to Krakow?

Yes, then we went back because we had to go back to ghetto because no Jew was allowed to live in any of those little towns anymore.

So they emptied out all those towns?

Yes, yes. They emptied out all those towns and we had to go back to the ghetto.

What was your family doing during those during that-- that was quite a long period of time that you were in Wieliczka?

Nothing, nothing.

What did you live from?

We were selling our possessions all the time because Jews were not allowed to work.

What did your family do the whole day?

Nothing. I had a teacher coming to the house to teach the children because we were not allowed to go to school. And my parents did nothing. Play cards, sitting, we were not allowed to do anything. Sometimes they took a few men to work, to shovel snow, you know slave labor, but we were just at home all the time. It was a very difficult life. You have to bring water from the well. There were no toilets, you had to go out to the toilets. There were chores that have to be done at home. We were not allowed to have any help.

So my mother worked very hard. I had to help her. And I had to study as much as possible. And at one point when I was sitting with my teacher and studying, somebody said that the German is coming. So we had to hide all those books. And he was just our friend. He was not the teacher anymore. Because it was against the law to teach Jewish children.

The teacher was Jewish or not?

Yes, yes. Professor [? Marimijnski ?] He was a professor of Hebrew in the Hebrew school I think. But he taught everything. At this point we couldn't have a choice of any other teacher.

How many children were in the group?

Two.

Not many.

No, no, no, no no, no.

How do you remember the mood of the-- it was basically your family.

Yes.

How do you remember the mood of the group day by day?

I think that they were fighting just to go through the time. You know it was very sad. And we were hoping that the war will be through. They will be finished very soon, and we were living day by day. We didn't know what's going to be tomorrow.

So these approximately two years were relatively calm?

Yeah, yeah.

Boring but calm.

Right, Right.

Then what happened?

They were not so calm believe me. It was not that calm because the Germans came in and they were looking for gold in between. And they usually come in the middle of the night. And there was some of the owner of the house that we lived

in, and I don't know they were looking for him constantly. He didn't do anything, but for some reason, he jumped out the window, and he was hiding. And they were looking for him all over. So you know the whole house was affected. But basically--

Even when it's calm it can be nerve-racking.

Nerve-racking constantly. Constantly nerve-racking.

And then you received instructions that you're to leave Wieliczka and you had to go back to Krakow and to the ghetto.

To the ghetto, yes.

What did the ghetto consist of?

It was surrounded by either a wall or a wire. The conditions was horrible. It was like maybe five, six families in one apartment. We had wall-to-wall beds. And we had to go to work. So I and my mother we worked in an upholstery shop.

And then my mother got sick. I think she had pneumonia. And she was taken to the hospital. There's a very famous hospital. And me and my brother was left alone, and I had to take care of him. He was a little boy. I was going to work, coming back taking care of him.

It just so happened that the hospital was in the same building that we worked. And it was a back way staircase into the hospital. And it was not known. Nobody knew about it. Only the people did work because it was right in the same room. And of course my father was not-- I mean, he was not with us. He was in Stalowa Wola. And he died there of starvation.

When did he go to Stalowa Wola again?

He went straight from Wieliczka because he was never in ghetto with us, as far as I remember.

Was he given any reason for being taken or he just taken?

No, no. He was just taken. The Germans didn't ask any reasons.

When he went to Stalowa Wola did you have any dealings with him after that?

No. That was the last?

That was the last. Yes, yes, yes. And he died exactly--

And exactly where was Stalowa Wola.

It was not far from Krakow. I don't know the proximity exactly. I really don't know.

And that was a labor camp?

That was a labor camp. Yes, yes. It was a vernichtung camp because very few people really came out of there. They did not get food. They ate leaves from the ground. What this man that I told you before he was-- my mother wanted to send a coat for my father, and the man said that he's not going to take the cold anymore because my father is not alive, that he died of starvation. He was completely swollen.

You mean when he went with the cold he came back and gave that.

No, no, no. My mother went to his house, to this man's house. He was a Jewish policeman. My mother went to his house to bring the coat because he was going back to Stalowa Wola. For some reason this one man was allowed to go back

between ghetto and Stalowa Wola. I don't know what was the reason.

And my mother wanted to send that coat to my father. And he said that he's not going to take the coat. He was a very nice man because he could have taken the coat and taken it for himself. But he saw a woman with two children.

What, is he going to take it? And a coat was a very big deal there. And so that's how we know that he died of starvation there.

But he knew it all along?

Yes, he knew it all along.

That's the way he told your mother.

He probably thought that my mother will forget about the coat and she's not going to bother. But when he saw that she is bringing the coat for him, he had no choice.

When he saw as she is bringing the coat.

Yes, yes.

All right. So now you're in the ghetto with your mother and your little brother. Your mother caught something like pneumonia, she was in the hospital. How old was your mother?

My mother was born 1905.

So she was in her middle 30s?

Right.

A young woman.

A young woman. Yes, yes. And she was in the hospital she was very sick. And then came-- this was just a few months before the liquidation of the ghetto. And we knew what happens to hospitals, that people would get shot. So I went through the back door, so I told you the stairway, and I wanted to take her out from the hospital.

But her clothes was locked up in the locker. In the steel locker was the lock. I have no idea how I did it. I caught a corner from the locker, and I bended it. Till today, I have no idea how I did that, and I took out her coat and her clothes, and I dressed her. And I took her out from the hospital. Within hours, the Germans came in and they shot everybody. Within hours.

So a miracle.

A miracle. When I talk I get goose pimples when I talk about it.

And you were 11 years old.

I was-- no this was 1943. It was 1943, I was 13.

13 or so. You look at 13-year-old children today.

Today they're babies.

Yeah. And how did you do it?

I don't know. I guess the adrenaline or something. I don't know how I did it. Until today I have no idea how I bent the steel locker. And I took her out and she was so sick. And we had some acquaintances, friends and I took her under one arm and the other woman took her on that other arm and we were marching towards the ghetto. I mean towards concentration camp.

From the ghetto.

From the ghetto. Now, my little brother was with us. But the Germans didn't let him go. So my mother had to make a decision-- to go with me to a concentration camp or to stay with my little brother.

You had to go to a concentration camp.

Yeah.

But your mother had a choice.

She had the choice to stay.

How is it that she had a choice and you didn't?

I had the choice to stay, too. I had the choice to stay or not to go. But if you stay, you know that you are going to be killed.

In the camp?

This was in ghetto.

In the ghetto, I mean. And you thought that by going to the concentration camps--

That we might still be alive. Yes. So my mother had to make the decision to go with me or to stay all of us with my brother. But this happened so fast that we left my little brother standing in the middle of the street and obviously she decided to go with me. And if you would see how the child was crying, it was just terrible. And he stayed.

But for some reason somebody, one of our friends-- we had a lot of friends-- it was a woman, Mrs Green I remember her name. She came to concentration camp. Her husband was a policeman, a Jewish policeman. And she came to concentration camp with both children and she took my little brother with her. Because she knew who we were. So she said that this little kid is hers. So he came to concentration camp and we were together for a time until they made a kinderheim.

Was your brother allowed to remain with you and your mother in the camp?

For a time. For a time, yes.

Because generally I thought they separated male from female.

Very short time, very short time.

But this is right at the beginning that they weren't that organized.

That's right, exactly. Right in the beginning. And I tell you what else happened. As soon as we came to concentration camp to Plaszców, my mother went to the hospital.

And the camp you went to was Plaszców?

Yes, yes. My mother had to go to the hospital because she was very sick. So I stayed with my little brother. I was taking care of him. There was a Doctor Gross which was hung after the war for doing experiments on people. I don't know why he took care of my mother and she survived. She got well. And then she came out of the hospital and we worked again in the upholstery shop.

Well, actually we both went to the kinderheim and my mother was working at the upholstery shop. But at one point I was bored and I couldn't stay any longer there. So I told my mother that I want out from there. And it was allowed. At that time you could have gone back and forth. And I was already a big girl. And my mother used to dress me--

A big girl of how old?

Of how old? This was in 1944. So I was 15.

So you are in Plasz³w. You went in '43.

43. Yes.

How long were you Plasz³w?

I think till 1944.

About a year or so?

A little bit more than a year. A little bit more. We were there a year and maybe three or four months.

Yeah. The commandant was Amon Goeth. Do you remember him?

Of course I remember him. He were a murdered. He was such a killer. We were so scared of him. Only to look at him, we were dying. And when he came into our shop where we were working, we were so scared because he just took out the gun and shot anybody that he didn't like the look of. He just took out the gun and shot.

Oh, I remember him. How he was a dog. Was a Dalmatian. Was a wild animal. It's considered that Dalmatian should be a nice dog, you know calm. This dog was trained to be a killer.

And then there came time that they took all the children about maybe two or three days after I left. They took all the children from the kinderheim. I don't know how you call it. Children's home or the children home. It was a barrack. And they took all the children, and none of them ever survived. None. Not even one.

But Plasz³w was a labor camp, wasn't it?

Yes, yes, yes.

How did the children perish?

They loaded them on the trucks, and all the people from that camp had to stand in a big field, which was called the appellplatz. We were lined up five in a row, you know, big rows. Each were five in a row. And we had to watch when they were taking out the children and loading them on trucks.

And the music was playing. And we heard the kids crying and screaming. Look, you have 3 years old, 5 years old, 10-year-old. They think they were being taken away. And we had to stand there, and listen to all those screams, and not to move. So you can imagine that.

And did they drive them away?

Yes.

Do you know where?

That was it. That was it. Hundreds of kids. There were few trucks that they were loading the children. And the screams were unbelievable, those screams. That's the last that I saw of my one cousin and my brother.

Your brother's name was?

Daniel. I never saw him again. Although we made up that whoever survived we should meet in Poland after the war at a certain person's house in Krakow, but he never showed up. Because my mother drilled it into us. You know we had a family meeting whoever survive should go to this man, he was a Polish man that worked for us for years. And the only person that ever showed up it was my mother's brother. That's it. And we met by him. He was he was a contact between.

So you are in Plasza³w for a year and a few months.

Right.

You were doing some kind of upholstery work?

Yes.

What kind of business did your father have before the war?

We had a furniture store.

Was that related to upholstery?

Not really. Not directly.

And what happened after a year and a quarter?

After the year and a quarter, they loaded us in trains to go to Auschwitz.

Which wasn't too far from Plasza³w.

It wasn't near, but we were going for two days and two nights.

How did they manage to make it in two days and two night?

I don't know. I have no idea. I don't know.

I understand it is 45 minutes.

Yes. Yeah. Normally. But we were in those trains for days. I'm telling you. I think it was two days and one night, or two nights and one day. I don't remember exactly.

Who was in the train with you?

My mother and some other people that I don't know who they were. We were picked I think 100 people to one wagon.

That was meant for--

It was meant for animals.

For how many?

I don't know. Maybe five, six animals could fit in there. And the window was about this big, there was no air. We were dying every minute. There were no toilets. There was no water. There was absolutely nothing there and people were fainting. And after we were unloaded, a few people were dead. If anybody had any sickness or anything, they died. And finally we came to Auschwitz. And of course, there was Mengele. There were ghetto, a whole staff.

How do you know it was Mengele?

Because I know him. I know who he was.

Everybody said that was Mengele?

Yes.

He was known at the time?

Yes, yes.

Before you came there people heard of him?

I heard of him but I didn't know who he was. But everybody knew that it him.

Today everybody I talked to says they came to Auschwitz and there was Mengele.

Because he was there.

But there were others also.

There was a whole staff. There were maybe 10 Germans there. Very high-high ranking officers. And we were told. We knew that it was Mengele.

Then you went from the train. What happened?

For the selection.

Immediately.

Immediately. Right straight from the train, we went for a selection. And I always said--

Men and women?

No, no, no, no, no. We were only women.

You were only women. Even on the train?

Yes.

Your car. Your kind of car was all women.

You know something? I don't remember that. But I know that at the selection we were only women I think so. I don't remember that. And I had to fight with my mother all the times. Because I always pushed her first. I wanted to know

where she was selected to go to so I would follow.

And she always screams at me, no, you don't follow me. You go where there is life because I'm a little bit older. She was 30 some years old. And she says, but you have to survive.

I said, no I don't want to survive without you because there is nobody else left. And every time we went through a selection there was this discussion constantly, constantly. And we went through a few selections.

I said, no you have to survive. Somebody will show up after the war. I don't want you to be dead. I said, no I don't want to survive because I want to be with you. And this was constantly going on. But anyway we both survived that particular selection. We were shaven off all the hair. We were taken to the baths which it was like not guess. And we stayed for quite a few months in Auschwitz working outside carrying stones back and forth, which I have no idea we were taking stones from this place putting them there, taking from there, and bringing them back. That was our work.

And at one point when they were giving out clothes after the selection, I received a red dress. And red was-- everybody saw it so whenever they needed the dress, I want that girl with the red dress. Whatever they needed to do they called me. And I had no choice because I couldn't change clothes. This was my only cloth.

You mean the Germans wanted you.

Yeah.

And what do they want you to do?

A little bit extra work. To stay a little bit longer. But I was lucky I was never hit. And I was never really hit by a German.

You know why?

No. I have no idea why. I really don't know.

You know why others were hit?

For no reason at all. Absolutely no reason at all. Because I remember when we were in Plasz³w still, we had to go to this big field with appellplatz, and a girl right next to me her name was Martha Fresh. She was she was standing right next to me. And we were standing in the row of five, beautiful girl, they took her out and they gave her 25 on the behind. No reason at all. She was standing right next to me. They were taking out people constantly. This was the mood of Mr Goeth. He wanted to hit a few people.

And now you're a Plasz³w victim?

Yeah. This was Plasz³w.

Now, in Plasz³w, I would imagine everybody was Polish. All the Jews were from Poland?

Yes, yes, yes. But at one point they had some Hungarian people coming. Yes, yes, very few. But it didn't mean anything.

And in Auschwitz where were the people from?

From all over. We met people from Czechoslovakia. We met people from Hungary, from Romania, from Holland, from the Island of Rhodes, and someplace. There were people from-- there were French people.

Were you aware of people coming and people going?

Yes, yes, we were. Yes.

Every day.

Every day. Every day there were people coming. And there were people being taken away. A big transport of people and we did not know where.

Did you discover later on where?

No. No. The most of them were taken to other camps to work.

Like now when you came to Auschwitz, do you have an idea of what day it was?

I think it was in July.

July of--

1944.

In July 1944, the war was going very badly for Germany.

But we didn't know.

But you didn't know it.

No.

And Auschwitz was operating how at that time? I'm trying to get the picture of how the famous camp of Auschwitz was functioning at a time the Germans knew that they were losing the war.

It was functioning very well. Very well organized. Absolutely very well.

It was busy.

It was very busy. It was very busy. The chimneys were going. The smoke was coming out.

You knew exactly what that was.

Oh, yes, yes.

Everybody knew.

Everybody knew. There was no secret about it. There was no secret. The smell I could just-- the smell was so horrible. Everybody knew about it. Everybody knew that they were making soap out those Jewish fat. This was the soap that they were giving out. It was mark R-I-F, Rein Judisches Fett. Maybe you didn't know about it.

And we knew about it, but we had no choice. At one point when we were in Auschwitz, my mother was becoming gray. She got gray very young. And we were afraid that something-- you know when they see gray hair although the face was young, they'll kill her.

We had a woman doctor that was working in one of the hospitals there. And she brought gentian violet. And my mother mixed it somehow and she puts it on her hair it was violet but it wasn't gray. There was all kinds of things that we had to do to make our cheeks red. You know when the German come--

How did you do it?

How did we do it? There were bricks. I know my mother was mixing something but I didn't need it because I was very young. But my mother was helping other people with gray hair. I remember that.

There were a lot of women. They saw what my mother did, so they wanted to do it, too. So my mother used to do it for all the women who wanted it because for some reason she had access to the gentian violet.

But it was not in a liquid form. It was in the powder form. And so she mixed it. Here you buy it, it's in the liquid form.

And something they were doing from the redbrick something. I don't remember exactly what to make the cheek red and they put it on the lips that they should look like presentable. Of course, we were working. And we stayed there till-- I know it winter but I don't know what month it was.

Did you understand why with all that was going on with the murder rate that was going on that you were allowed to continue working?

No. I did not understand it.

Did you ever think about it?

No never. Never even thought about it.

You and your mother in that group.

I don't know whether my mother thought about it. I'm sure she was older and she thought about it. But I just-- I did not understand it. I really didn't.

You knew that Goeth was the commandant in Plasza³w. Did know who the commandant was in Auschwitz?

No.

Man's name was Hoss.

Hoss.

Yeah.

I heard the name. I heard the name.

So what was the difference that the commandant in Plasza³w was so well known to the people.

Because this was-- you see Auschwitz was very big.

Much bigger Plasza³w.

Much bigger than Plasza³w, and we were actually not in Auschwitz, we were in Birkenau.

Birkenau was worse.

Right. But we never had the contact with Hoss. I never saw him. I heard about him but I never saw him.

What did you hear about him?

Not much, not much. But Goeth, we saw him. We saw him shooting people. We saw him killing people. So we saw him much more than-- I never saw Hoss in my life. So that's how we know. I just remembered something to say and I forgot it. I forgot something very important. I just thought about it and I forgot. When we left Auschwitz, we were loaded again into cattle cars. But not as many people as before. We were maybe 40 or 50 people, which was wonderful because we could have sat down.

Also my mother had some few diamonds and some dollars wrapped up as a wound on her finger. You know it was all wrapped up. And in Auschwitz, my mother was a very smart woman. In Auschwitz she had contact with some men over the wires. You see we had no contact with men but over the wires we saw a few men. So she made a deal with one man. We don't know who he was. That she will give him \$10, and he would bring 1/2 a pound of sugar and four loaves of bread. So she took the money, wrapped it up in the paper with a stone and she threw it over and then he brought and he threw over.

It was lucky. We could have been shot, also. It was lucky that nobody saw it. So when we went on the train out from Auschwitz, we had enough bread to hold us over until we got to Czechoslovakia. So that was a little bit of a help.

That the man was a German?

No, no, no. It was a Jew, a prisoner. A prisoner.

And he could get so much bread?

Yes. He probably worked someplace. Or maybe it was not a Jew, maybe he was non-Jew. But it doesn't matter he was a prisoner. It didn't matter whether he was a Jew because he had the same--

How did she know he could be part of this deal?

My mother knew everything. You have no idea how smart she was. She was a businesswoman before the war together with my father. As a matter of fact, she was the businesswoman. My mother had a contact with everybody. She was a very smart woman, and she knew how to wheel and deal to survive.

Did this have something to do-- and this has a lot to do with her ability to survive.

I think so. I think so. Yes, yes. All right, and now I know what I was going to say. When we were in Auschwitz, first of all when they were taking transport of people to take away to different concentration camp, for some reason my mother didn't want to go yet. She was not ready to go yet. We had the choice to stay the last ones. So at one time, we were hiding under the beds. What do you call those? Bunks.

The bunks.

The bunks.

And we did not go. And there were very few people left. So we had no choice. We couldn't stay any longer, and we went 1,000 women. We were sent to this other camp in Czechoslovakia by the name of Kratzau.

Yeah. In Czechoslovakia.

Right.

That was in--

This was in 1944.

Yeah. I think he told me that it was November '44.

I think so I'm not sure maybe it was October.

October then you changed it.

You know months, days didn't mean anything. You knew it was cold, or it was warm, or it was hot. There was no date.

It was towards the end of 1944.

Yes. So we went to the--

We've said a lot about October.

Right. And we went to Kratzau, which we were working in the ammunition and parts for the aeroplane factory. We were 1,000 women. It was not the worst camp because they were not shooting anybody. Whoever died, died. But they were not killing us.

At one point, there was a German. I don't know his name. There was a woman from Greece I think. Either Greece or Turkey. She was working with me, and we were moving parts of an aeroplane big tremendous triangles for some reason. They were part of aeroplane.

He took us from one storage to move them over to another storage, which was hundreds and hundreds of feet. Just the two of us, and the woman was pregnant. And this killer used to step on our toes all the times while we were taking those parts. There was hundreds of them.

So we finished. He says, now I decide that they have to go back to the other side. He was doing exactly the same thing. My mother was with me, but she was not working with me. For some reason, we were divided. So she was working on a night shift. And I was working on the day shift and I never saw her.

So with me was a Hungarian girl, very lovely girl that worked in the same place as I did. And her mother also worked with my mother. So we made a deal.

I said listen, if you want to work with my mother but if I go to the German, Meister was his name. I don't know the boss of the-- not the boss-- it was the manager of the department. I was very brave at that time. I said, I'll go to him but my mother will have to work on the day shift and you go to your mother there. If I take care of it. This is the deal.

So she says, OK. She had no choice, because she wouldn't go to him. So I went to this manager, and I spoke quite well German. And I told him, I said, listen my mother is working on the night shift. Would you mind if I exchange those two?

He said, you do whatever you want to. I didn't see it. He was a very nice man. So when we were going home-- yeah, we were going home and my mother was coming--

What was home?

Home, to the barrack to sleep. Oh, what am I talking about? We were going back from work to the barrack and I saw my mother going I was going down the stairs and she was coming up the stairs. So I took her out and pushed the girl in.

And she worked all the time. She was so happy because we saw each other on a weekend. She was happy and I was happy because we were together.

Yeah. As you tell the story, I can't help but think the German was nice. He said he didn't want nobody. They were losing the war at the time.

Possible. That's possible.

So things started happening like this?

But he was not a very bad man. Because he only took care of what we were doing. He was only taking care. Do this, and do this, and do this, and he didn't-- I think he was only a military man. He was not a Nazi.

But two years earlier, he would have followed orders completely.

Probably, yes.

Now already the discipline was giving away.

Yes, it was given way. Yes, yes. It's true.

That's what it sounds like.

Yes, yes, yes, yes. You're absolutely right. Also when we came from Auschwitz to Kratzau, we only had a dress. And it was getting to be winter. We had no coats. We had no shoes.

And I said to my mother, we have to do something. If not, we're going to die. So I went to the same German, and I said, listen would you give us a letter because there was a magazine of clothes-- to give us a letter that we should go to that storage room and give us coats. So he says, how many do you want?

I said-- there was a group of us working together. I think we were eight. I said, I need eight. So he gave me a letter. And all of us went into that storage room and there was a German woman giving out those stuff.

So how did you get it so I showed it to her who gave it to us and obviously she listened and she gave us those coats. But there were 1,000 women there. I couldn't get it for 1,000 women. And the next morning we all wore them. You should see those coats. But at least they were warm with those big sleeves. But who cared?

So they all ask me, how did you do it? How did you get it? I said I went to him and he gave it to me. But they couldn't go to this guy because he was only in our group taking care of. I said go to your manager maybe he'll give it. Nobody got it. Absolutely nobody wanted to give it to them. So that's what I'm saying this man was not as bad as all the other ones.

And you were all of what age at this time?

I was the youngest one there.

You were about 15, maybe 16.

15. I was 15.

You grew up very early.

I never was a child. I was a child until when I was nine years old. Then I was I don't remember being a child anymore. And then we were liberated.

But what happened? But before we get to that, in Auschwitz you said there were people coming from all over Europe. Did you see differences among the people coming?

What do you mean by differences?

In terms of being able to take the difficult living over there?

Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. We were used to it. So we got used to it slowly. From Wieliczka to ghetto to Auschwitz. But there were people that came from Holland, to people that came from Island of Rhodes and they were taken straight from homes. From luxurious homes straight into the concentration camp. And they died so fast the Germans didn't even have a chance to kill them.

They were dying because they were starving constantly. We were used to starvation already. And they were not. They were not like-- I'm telling you like my mother had contact. Other people had different contact with somebody. And those people were not used to it yet. And by the time they realized what's happening, they were dying like flies.

So from which countries--

Mostly from Holland.

From which countries besides Poland were they able to suffer better? There was no language.

There is no language. I think the Hungarians.

And that was a time that many Hungarians were coming. This was in summer of 44.

They survived. They really survived. They were lovely girls.

But they also came from a rather calm existence.

I know, but for some reason they were much stronger. They were much stronger, and they were very shrewd. They knew how to get a little bit extra. Better at how to steal another blanket. How to protect themselves, which the other ones were not.

In terms of the ones who were the prison guards, you had from which nationalities? You had some Germans there?

Yes. Wait a minute where?

Wherever you were in Plaszów in Auschwitz.

In Plaszów were German and Ukrainian.

Ukrainian. And in Auschwitz?

Auschwitz were only German. Mostly women.

You dealt with German women all the time of day?

I didn't deal with them. I tell you in each barrack there was a woman out there. I don't know how you call them.

Something alteste, I think that--

Yes, [NON-ENGLISH]. That's right. Those were mostly prisoners for some crimes.

They were prisoners for crimes.

For crimes. Yes.

They always, they were very fine people.

Yeah, very fine people, very fine. They were prisoners of crime, and they were taking care of us.

Oh, what do you mean that they took care of you?

Oh, they took care. They really took care. They didn't let you sleep. They woke you up in the middle of the night.

They were hitting, and they were screaming. And if came some food, they gave you half of it. Because half of them, each one of them had a lover. A woman, a woman lover.

This was open?

There was, yes. There was no problems. And who cared anyway? We were so starved. We were so hungry to even looked at them?

We didn't care. Nobody cared at this point. We were so hungry.

But they were also very unhappy people?

I don't think so.

How could they be happy with what they were doing?

Because they had the power. You see?

And this made them feel good?

Yes, yes. You see power.

Miserable life.

Miserable life, but they were not hungry. And you see, we slept maybe 500 or 600 women. I don't know how many we were in one barrack. They had a separate room of their own with a bed and a table. So they were much better off than we were.

And they had the power. And power is what they wanted. You see. And they had food. They could do whatever they wanted to with us. They took women to clean their shoes. They would take the women to clean their rooms.

And they thought this was forever?

Oh, yes, yes, yes. They thought it was forever. That's right. That's right. So they were not unhappy. You should see. I think they were quite content with their power. You know what power does to people. And this is the only time of their life they could have had power. Because when they were in prison before the war, they were prisoners. And here, they were the ones that were ruling the prisoners.

I understand what you're saying. But I still hear it is a miserable existence.

Of course it's a miserable existence. But it was better than staying in prison.

But let's get back to Czechoslovakia. You were working what kind of a factory?

In parts of the airplane and ammunition. And some girls were very smart. They were packing the ammunitions. And while they were packing their ammunition, they urinate on them. So they were not usable. That's what they all told me.

And it makes you feel better.

You know that somebody had a little bit of control of maybe the war will end sooner. I don't know if it meant anything. Then at one point while we were there came-- I don't remember how many people came from the Red Cross. And they brought us food, cheese, and a piece of salami.

When was this?

This was sometimes maybe in spring but just maybe spring of 45.

The war was ending.

Yeah, it was ending. Yeah, but we didn't know that. We didn't realize that. We didn't know that. They brought us food, all kinds of foods. And we ate this, and some people got sick because we were not used to it.

And talking about food, at one time, there was some kind of a curfew for some reason in the concentration camp. You were not allowed to go-- we had the barrack that had three floors, and we were sleeping on a second floor. I don't know what-- somebody must have done something. I don't know what it was the reason.

And they sent my mother up to the third floor to stay there. And she did not get any food by mistake. I think the third floor was banished from getting food on that particular day. And by some reason, my mother was sent up there, and I saw it. I said, oh my God, if she's not going to eat the whole day, it's going to be a disaster.

The tape is running out. We'll pick up from here in a few moments.