

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Lonia Mosak
July 17, 1990
RG-50.030*0166

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Lonia Mosak, conducted on July 17, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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LONIA MOSAK

July 17, 1990

Q: Would you tell me your name please?

A: Lonia Mosak.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born in Ciechanow, Poland.

Q: When?

A: In July 20, 1922.

Q: Tell me about your parents and your family?

A: Well, my husband...my father was a sign-maker. I managed to finish school before the war, 1926. Yes. Then I went to learn a profession.

Q: Let's see. Before you jump to 1933, your father was a signmaker. Tell me, did you have brothers and sisters?

A: Yes. Yes. I have...I have three brothers. One died before the war and one was taken in Auschwitz in a selection, and one went to Russia, the oldest one, but he came back after the war and got married in Chicago. I brought him here, and he got killed in a car accident. Yal. He left a wife and three children.

Q: What about your school then. Tell me about the school you went to.

A: Well, we...we had a separate school for Jewish kids, you know, was separate. They let them...

Q: Excuse me. This makes noise.

A: We finished school and I belonged to a Zionist movement. When I was 12 years old, we started. And we used to go to seminars with other kids from other cities. It was well organized in the future what you saw it was working like you know through the city. It was a poor life in Poland, but we were happy. We didn't know any other way how to live, so that was it," you know. Then when the war broke out in 1939, when the Germans came in the first thing what they did, they collected all the real Orthodox Jews and put into the synagogue and they had to take out all the, you know, and everything the...and everything and put on the sidewalk and burn them". Only Jewish people have to do this. Then they started to grab people to work every single day. Every Jew who walked by a building where there was a German officer, he had to kneel down and take off their hats when they passed by; otherwise, they would be shot, you know. Then

when they came out to talk to the people, they said, "Good morning, brother " . " He says, "Good morning, swine." You know what swine is? Pigs. Okay. Then they started to grab people to work. All the time. Then they start to confiscate all the business what the people had. So there was a lot of "Holsterges living in our city, so they knew exactly the addresses and the names of the people who had business. So they went in and they confiscate everything. Then while we were sleeping, started to rip off the roofs from the building,...the roofs because they thought they're going to make a garden in the middle of the city so the Jewish people shouldn't live there. So everybody start to run to different places. They lived like 10...10 people in one small room. Then I got sick from typhus. Jewish people was not allowed to use a doctor or a drugstore or a hospital. So they...me and may womans...in the outskirts of the city in a little room." and they sent in a doctor, a Jewish doctor. I think he came from Germany. He had one artificial leg. There was no medication and everybody was dying every day and I expect to die too, but it was a miracle. After 8 weeks laying there, I kind of recovered. There was no medication or nothing. They cut off the hair and everything. Then they started to take hostages...people. They want so much money. Ten and a half figures, two and a half figures. People gave away everything. They got the rings, their watches, even the gold you put in your mouth, just "to take all those people. Then...

Q: What happened?

A: No. They released them. They released them. Then they organized like a Judenrat. They have a release from all the people, start to make a gold star. We have to wear one on the left side and one on the right side, so when you walk on the street you know that you're a Jew. I went out from that thing when I recovered." There was no food. Nothing to eat. People just starving, families. I lived in an attic. It was terrible condition, so we start to ask the Russian...German, "Why don't you kill us?" They says, "No, we need those guns on the front. You'll die anyway." So after a couple of months, they decided they're not going to make a ghetto. The city's too pretty. They going to make fine building. "It's so close "through Germany. They're going to take half of them from Mlawa and half of them to "Newstadt, the ghetto. We have to go out the middle of the night, all of us to...to go to a little bridge where the water was to go into that castle. You know babies was crying. Somebody picked up a baby, but it's shot right away. Then inside we had to go out to another...nother door. On both sides were standing the German, the black uniform and "throwing down the rifles and beat over the head. Everybody went down. The blood was running like water. Finally, we had to run the truck. They took the doctor, threw him down on the ground, and the Gestapo stepped on his face with the feet and hand. He committed suicide in Auschwitz. " . But then they took us to Newstadt. We came into Newstadt. There was a ghetto already. In the...and we watched 20 minutes, they had to beat up a Jew. There was no place where to go in. People was running like crazy. They cut off the hair from the woman. I ran into a stable. That where we lived there for a couple of weeks and we organized...we made a kitchen with a little bit soup to give the people. And whole families die over night.

Q: Tell us...tell us...slow down just a little. Tell us what it was like in the stable.

A: That unreal. First of all, no water, no food or nothing. People was dying and we was jealous they're already dead. Finally, I found out that they hanged my uncles in the other city. I found out. I didn't want to tell my aunt. So she saw me, she said what are you crying. I said,

"No." "Did you hear something?" I said, "No. I didn't hear." I didn't want to tell her. She didn't know til the last minute. Then they decided they're going to take us to Auschwitz. We didn't know where we're going. They took us in those cattle trains, locked in, for 3 days and 3 nights. Women are giving the babies urine to drink. It was bad. Half of them die anyway. And they took us ride for 3 days like that. We came out and everything got to be fast...fast. We came into Auschwitz. We didn't know what's going. It was in the middle of the night. They always did it in the middle of the night. They...right away, they cut off like let's say a 100 women, men, 200, a 100 men. You could be young. You didn't have a chance. They just cut off a group. That many they let into the camp. Right away, we don't see our people...anything...our parents. In a second, you didn't see it. They divided. Right. Left. Right. Left. Dr. Mengele. Once they had a little group for the camps, the rest went to the crematorium. Let's say there was like 3,000 people in that train. They took out 200 or 300 for the camp. Then we realized...they took us into a room and they told...we had to take off the clothes, everything. Cut our hair all over, and then they gave us those clothes. They didn't even fit. Gave us those clothes, and they took us into a barrack. The barrack was...had to hold thousand people, not less. So there was their "couriers. How do you call it...where we in three lines. Nothing there, no" blankets or nothing. Some of them slept on the...on the bricks. Then about 4:00 in the morning, we had to get up and stand naked even in the winter to see if we have a clear skin. There they count us in 5, a hundred in a group, and the SS with the dogs took us to work. We had to walk, let's say, maybe 10 miles a day to work. Many of them died on the way walking so they give us a stick to put us there dead people. Two have to hold them this way. One have to hold their feet to take them to the place where we supposed to work. Then we have to bring them back because the appell. They have to count the people that everybody's there. So we have to bring those dead people back, so they put them like on a piece of wood two hold here and the rest of them hold here, to bring those dead people because everybody gotta be counted. Then when we looked around we saw people are standing in the line to get into the crematorium. No food. No bathrooms. No nothing. They want to get all already we be dead". The crematoriums was going for 24 hours. Day and night. Before you saw ""They bring transports from all over Europe, from France, from Belgium, from Holland, from Poland, from every country in Europe. They didn't miss one country. I think maybe Norwegian they missed. The conditions in the camp was horrible. We didn't see...for 7, 8 months there was no water in Auschwitz, completely. They just...just put electric wires around for barracks. There was nothing else there. No water. After 7, 8 months, there's no water there. We have to walk to work every day. Hungry. The lice on the whole body, all over our faces. " It was snowing. Beaten up. One time an SS man beat me up with the rifle. He thought I'm dead already. I starts to work. Beat us up. " You know just for fun. Pulled out a few people, beat us up. Then they gave us a piece of bread, but we didn't know, should we take a crumb every hour or should we swallow it right away. We couldn't figure out what to do with this. When we ate it up, we was sorry why we ate it up already. This way we have another crumb to eat. We was going to work...was beaten up, after work all the time, kicked us up, beat us up. " That what we have to do. Slapped us. Iron wagons with the bricks. You know, it wasn't actually work, but on top of it just to make people work. Just to make people work. Then on Sunday, when we came back from work Sunday, the day off, we had to put our clothes, button up in the back and put in a lot of sand so one place we "slept to another one. So people who couldn't run fast, the dogs went after them. Always beaten up, you know. It was a helluva condition. I can't believe...I was 18 years old that that. I...I can't visualize how people can even go through that without food, without water, with everything. That was going on for 2 and a half years in...in the camp. Then when

they saw the Russian...the Russian are coming, they took us from Birkenau to Auschwitz. There was already better buildings and a better thing. In Birkenau, I forgot to mention, that...there was an uprising in Birkenau. They killed a lot of Germans. They put them in the oven, but in 5 minutes the whole sky was with so many German airplanes that you couldn't see the skies anymore. And everybody who was moving was killed anyway. People start to run. They wants to find out how those people was organized because nobody can have a pencil or a piece of paper. One of mine counselor, like a blockalter, was 5 girls, 5 sisters from Czechoslovakia. She kind of tried to put on paper what's happened and she hid it in her coat and they find it. So they said they're going to shot her. So the other four sisters stood by and they said, "We want to be shot too." So they shot all five sisters. Then when they start to figure out how the uprising...there was a girl...I think was her name. I forgot. "I think." And she was organized this thing. So they wants to take her to hang her, so she cut her veins. And she slapped the SS man. He says, "You're dying." She says, "I die today, but you gonna die tomorrow." Even make a film from that. Then one girl dropped...girls who brought in the evening ammunition what they smuggled out" ammunition. One girl broke down. They beat her up and she says, "If you tell us, what's happening, you're gonna be "sleep. We're not going to torture you." But that wasn't the...the fact. She knew three other girls. That's all she knew. And one of the girls was " my girlfriend. They beat her up. She didn't tell anything because they would hang a lot of people if she would tell to who she gave and how the things happened. The girl who gave up was the first to be hanged. The German punished her. And everybody have to stay and watch when they hang those four girls. It was like in...in January. In January 18, we have to leave the camp. They announced the microphone, we...I and five girls wants to hide it between the floor. So they announced on the microphone if they catch anybody, they will be shot on the spot. So I says to the girls, "Maybe it's no use to do it. It looks like the world's coming to an end to the German army. Let's go." So we starts to walk. We couldn't walk. We have to run out from the camp. And in five in groups. And who couldn't run was shot. Right away on the spot. Some people begged, "I want to just catch my breath." No. If you couldn't run, you know, people haven't good shoes and all these things, so they shot. And we was jealous. They are already dead, and they don't have to go through all this. Finally, they took us on a truck" to get deeper to Germany. We was without covers and the snow was coming on us. No boots. And then about thousand woman was walking. They threw one bread. You know how many people got killed just to...I never runned for that. I knew. The first one got crushed already. One bread for thousand people. "Such a sadistic way. Then they took us into Ravensbruck. In Ravensbruck, the hunger was unbelievable, terrible. Already, they gonna take us to Gross Rosen, and they didn't let us in. They got a little too many people, so they took us to Ravensbruck. In Ravensbruck, we was there a couple weeks and saw the Russians were behind, coming, they took to from Mettlenberg, Newstadt " in the camp. A room like that was a few hundred women. If you lay down to sleep, you couldn't turn around. There was no room. That's how you had to lay all night. This was the...we was there in that camp. It was terrible. The hunger...they gave us a little piece of bread for 24 hours. It was unbelievable how people was dying. The end was near that camp was people...pilots...which they was shot down American planes, and Canadians so the Germans locked the gate and they ran away. It was in...

Q: I don't understand. Explain.

A: When the war come to a...to a finished, the German run away from that camp, from us, and they locked the gate. And we didn't know that the war was to end. So those people, those pilots cut the wires...you know was divided, and told us that the war is over. The Germans went away. So we starts to run to the...out to get some food, you know. All the Germans from this city left the houses. They knew that we come out they're gonna be killed. They knew that what was going down. So everybody left those houses...that we went into those houses, and we took food. We got food for here, but we were... But I even now we was tired walking, so the same day came in the...the American soldiers and the Russians the same day, to Mettlenberg. And they was kissing each other. Thank God that the war is over, because in some places the Germans was still fighting. So there was a guy...a German guy with a wagon with horses. So we told him to give us the wagon, the horses. He says, "No." So a Russian officer walked by, took him by the head, threw him in the..in the...in the yard. He said, "You give them everything they wanted." The Russians said that like this. They were very nice to us. Real nice. So we took the horses and the wagon and we start to go out closer to the city. Then when the night came over, we took out a house, and we went the house to stay overnight. Part of the way was a lot of soldiers. You know, they let out from Russia, from the jail everything, and there was a rape of a lot of girls. So one Russian officer came in, a very intelligent man, and he says, "Listen, the war is over. There's a lot of people came out from the jail. They do bad things. We can't control it. But I'm going to sit here a whole night and watch you." We were 10 girls together, which was nice. He was sitting. While he was sitting, they knocked on the door. They saw coming in. So he went to the door. They ran away. They was afraid for him. So he says, "I can't protect you anymore," he says. You take...try to take the trains and go to Berlin because in the city will be more protected. So we went on a train. The trains happened like there was going for an hour and 6 hours there was standing. It was broken off. We went in the train. We was together 10 girls. And Russian soldiers came in and they took I imagine they saw girls. They says, "We're going to bring our friends here." While he was in the other side, we ran out from the train. The train was standing. And there was a lot of broken trains. So we decided every girl would go, lay down under a train. In the morning, we will board it. We were laying like that a whole under those broken trains. You know, every girl. In...In the morning, we got up. The train left already with our stuff and everything. We didn't care already. So we starts to go from one city to the other til we got into Berlin. Well, being in Berlin, we didn't have any families. We didn't have anybody. They wasn't well organized like after the war, so we decided we're going back to Poland. Because we got some property there, we're going back to Poland. So 10 girls came back to Poland. We didn't realize that Poland was worse than with "the Germans. They didn't want any Jew to come there because then they claim their properties. So they didn't want us. So when you went out on the street, you saw laying dead Jews, which they came back from Russia or from the army. They weren't missed by nobody. They didn't have any family, so nobody knew who they are. Their families was killed, and they sneaked out from Russia in 1945. So all the time you saw. So finally, what we gonna do? I came back to my city. With five other girls, went in a house. The "Army Kiova went in and they killed those girls. One was under the bed. They didn't know that she's alive. She's 9 years old. " . Anyway, they saw a Jew, they killed it. They wasn't missed by nobody. So we decided it's not good we...in the city either. So we went to Lodz. I went. A few...a few remained. They got boyfriends right away. I went to Lodz. I came to Lodz. I went into a kibbutz. We got a roof over there. There's something to eat. Israel wasn't established in that time. I was in Lodz. So one group went to a different city for a...a reunion. They took off 4 boys...I shouldn't have bring their picture, I think I got. They took off four boys and a girl and they killed

them right away, from the train. It was 18 or 19 year olds. So you could only be in that kibbutz 6 months. We have to smuggle our way to Lodz. I find out that my brother is alive in Russia. I want to wait for him. So I went to Bialystok. " We went into a kibbutz. He was there. Another kapo man. Meantime, my brother came. The police came in one night and this...told us there're going to pogrom. They're going to kill us. So every 2 hours, 2 other men were standing. In time, 5 people went back to Lodz, those of us who want to" want to go.

Q: I don't understand.

A: Five people went to "Valsa from that kibbutz. Yal. ". In time, one boy saw what's going to come. He was hiding by another lady, she had a ". So they didn't see that boy. All the other 12 was killed. So he told us in Bialystok" that they was killed. He came into "Valsa. It's unbelievable. People don't realize how many Jews were killed after the war from the Polish end. The reason I was still in Poland...I didn't go to Israel", I was waiting for my brother. I know I had only one...one brother. He was alive. So I was waiting in Bialystok". Then the Brichah saw that too many Jews get killed in Poland, and we had to go out. But they came in...People start the killing for Russia because about half a million Jews escaped to Russia when the war started. But they start to come back. Some of them got killed in ". Some of them died. Some of them came back....the children. They came back to the Brichah, took us to Czechoslovakia. You have to work to the Polish. You took a train to Czechoslovakia. And over there, their parents was waiting for us. " You couldn't stay too long in Czechoslovakia. We had to go to Austria. We came to Austria in the barracks. I didn't have nothing to eat. We had to run in...in to the fields and catch a carrot or potato to eat, because they wasn't prepared for that. So in time, my husband had a couple of brothers in Russia.

Q: Hold it. Slow down a little bit. Where did you met your husband?

A: Yes. Well, I was standing like this...he...my husband was liberated in Austria. He didn't want to leave there. They gave him a hotel and they put a few people for those they were housing. The day he " boat is coming and some brothers in Russia, so he came to see if he'll find somebody. There's only people from Russia . They stood in Germany or in Austria. I said, "Well, the reason I went back to Poland, I knew I wanted to see if somebody is alive from Russia." My brother. So I stood there a year in Poland. You couldn't leave Poland. The...the Russian was there. You couldn't leave Poland, when the Russian was there. You couldn't leave Poland." " But the Brichah somehow got those people out from Poland to Czechoslovakia. And I met my husband and he told me that he had papers to go to the United States. A second cousin signed the papers. If I marry, I can be on those papers. So I says, "I have no choice. Either I wasn't established. I was sick and tired from...from all this life. I couldn't take it anymore. So I says, "Okay." But only if my brother goes with me, but it took the government in Austria to let him in because you not supposed leave the city.", only the ". So I got married. Right? After a week, I got married. We stood in Austria and we was waiting to immigrating to America. Here. But my brother couldn't. Only me because I was on the paper. When I came to America, it wasn't like now. They have...because we had a sponsor. That sponsor had to be a very cruel man. He got the papers for somebody else. So when we came here, we couldn't have any help from nobody. On the third day, I went to work down town. You know, I got work right away, and my husband couldn't get a job. I got a job. I start to work. I work overtime. I worked all the time, just to make

a little money. I said, "I don't want to be poor. I can't be without shoes, without clothes." And I start to work....

Q: Where did you work at?

A: I...work in a...not factory...making suits, ladies suits and clothes, you know. So I was there, kind of fast piece work. I worked all the time. Then my husband couldn't get a job, so somebody told us to open up a little cleaning store in a Polish@Jewish neighborhood. My husband didn't speak English. I speak a little bit. So we opened up that store. After work, I came in and worked in the clothing store til 12 o'clock at night to make a few dollars to get an apartment, you know. So after 2 years like that, then I have my children. And I had an apartment and I had a little money in the bank. I had the two children. My daughters are very well educated. They all finished college. And I had...my oldest will have a Masters from Harvard College. They took piano lessons 10 years, went to Hebrew school. All those things. My younger daughter is a lab technician. She got a good profession. She got married. Now she is India. (crying) If not, for her I wouldn't be alive. Only for her, I'm living. Not for me. (crying) You know, I can't sleep because all the pictures what we went through doesn't go away. When I sleep with my daughter...you see I live along my husband died 14 years old. When I live along, I don't know how I sleep. When I sleep with my daughter, all coming back to ". Cause I'm screaming, sometimes running, screaming and standing by the crematorium. That don't go away." I'm always screaming because it's very real and I dream about it. " and I don't know what's going on you know. But the only thing, if I would...if I wouldn't have my daughter because she's so good to me, it's unbelievable, I wouldn't be alive. I would finish my life because you have no relatives. On holidays or something, nobody's there. And I thought if I sleep three hours a night that's a lot. I can't fall asleep. Never. All the things comes back. I's real like I'm in Auschwitz. " No matter how much you try, you just can't go away all those things. " What else do you want to know?

Q: Let's hold it and stop the tape. What's going on?

Q: Turn the tape back on. Tell me when we rolling again. You okay?

A: Yal. I'm alright now. So if it's not for my brother, I would finish my life. Even though my other daughter is well educated, she is not as close to me as that one, you know". Yal. She's very good. She calls me every day. In the morning when she gets up, before she goes to sleep. They go trips. They always take me with, you know, so she's really my...my life. Without her, I wouldn't survive. You know, the older you get, the weaker you get to take all those things you know. The...it...it's harder to take, you know, when you think about all those things. It doesn't go away. Never goes away. The picture. All those pictures. When you laying in a stable, you haven't got work to eat, and you jealous the others die and I didn't. All those things doesn't go away. Never. I can see some people twill their little foot or something. That is unreal to me. And people was starving like that, but what the Germans did, I" don't think nobody can even put in words. All those things what happened. It's impossible to describe those things. Just impossible.

Q: Sonia. I would like to take you back again. Okay?

A: Yal.

Q: If we can. You told me...go back, all the way back to the ghetto.

A: Yes.

Q: You told me that your uncle was hanged.

A: Yal.

Q: There were several people hanged.

A: Yal. Seven people together

Q: ■ Alright. Can you go back and tell us very slowly the story of that.

A: Yal. Well, when they took us out from the city to the ghetto, there still was Jewish people in the "Channo. They need them for work so my uncle decided he'll go back with...with the daughter, you now. He was hiding in a attic, and for some reason the German find out about it. Some of them went a running back. They shot them right on the spot, you know, when they caught them on the way. ". They took my uncle, and they took the men whose house was there, and my cousin, a couple from another city, a boy, "Lindenberg from my city. And because my uncle have a brother, the brother have to be hanged too. Usually when they hanged people, they sold tickets that the Germans going to be show. When they hanged my city, I wasn't there when they hanged the five people. Two they hanged because they was hiding there. They throw around the things on the cemetery to find out. So they hanged two people. Then the hanged five other people, and the family...and they warned them if they cried, they'd be shot so they have to stay and watch it for 3 hours, from 6 to 9. Mine uncles, because they were prominent people, they paid off the Gestapo, they should make execution another city, so the family shouldn't stay and watch that. So they took it to "Mettlenberg, a different city and that happened in ", and they hanged those seven people. Mine cousin was fighting back and they shot her. She didn't want to walk up to the hanging. There was seven people. When I find out, I was in the ghetto. Mine...my aunt didn't know about it. I didn't want to tell her I find out. Then when I was in Auschwitz, I thought to myself if I ever survive, that's the only thing what I'm going to do is look for my brother who went to Russia and dig out those people. So I picked myself up and I went to this city, but a couple of Jews are there already. I walked into them and I told them to help me how to go through with that. I know it's not a easy thing.

Q: After the war?

A: After the war. Yal. They helped me. They helped me. They have to have a permit. They put them in one casket, all these things, and we got them on the Jewish cemetery. Then, a day later, I walked out to make a march on this little thing. I was arrested by the Polish people. So what are you doing on the cemetery. I said, "Well, I have to put a " because I'm going to leave this country." He says, "You are a spy." I said, "How am I spy when I have number on my hand. I was in Auschwitz for 2 and a half years." He said, "Everybody could make a number." So they arrested me. "You're on the cemetery. You're a spy." So finally, they let me out, you know. They

finally let me out. I was glad to leave that country. It's hard to believe it, what the Polish people did to the Jew. It's just unbelievable. If a person went in, he didn't go out alive. When I was in the ghetto, it was...uh...a Jewish man. He was a " ". You know what a " " means. So he divided between son...the son was by one family, and he was by another family." He had to have in the morning girls. And he paid off those Polish people. After the war, the guy come up...he's 9 years...their older son. I saw him when I was in Europe. He came out. He went into the other family to look for the father, but the father wasn't there. So he took a few Russian people and started to dig up in the basement and he was buried. They took the money, but they killed him on top of it. So the son " " by a different family. He was by a different family. It's unbelievable, you know. It's unbelievable. The Jewish people came back. They have a house. They figured they'd go and take the papers and get back. They walked in the house. They didn't come out alive. I have a close girlfriend now. She was in there from Warsaw, and she was hiding in the woods. She was lost in there. After the war, she came back to the girlfriend what she went to school together, and she says, "Could I sleep over by you til I get organized and we go further." She says, "Yes, you can sleep by me." While she was in bed, she hear the brother came in and he said, "What? You" took in a Jew? I'll kill her. I'll cut off her head." So she ran out through the window. Luckily, she wasn't sleeping. She heard that. So she ran out from the window. What? You gonna save "a Jew? After the war, mind you. That's how it was in Poland. It was a very danger life in Poland. I was there almost a year waiting for my brother came back from Russia. Otherwise I wouldn't probably stay that long over there. But it's unbelievable what's happened, you know. People come back. When we came into Czechoslovakia, the Brichah took us out. The Russians...they pick them up like a piece of bread, a little milk to get from the kitchen to everybody. They are different from people to people. The Czechoslovakian didn't know people are coming. They all run up and give away the last piece of bread." In Poland, " ". That's the way the situation was in Poland. It's unbelievable. I was glad to leave Europe. When I went back to Israel, they asked me, Don't you want " " "Don't you want to go to Poland to the " " ?" I says, "I don't want to look at their faces anymore. I don't want to have nothing to do with these people." That's the memories of these people.

Q: I'd like you to go back to Auschwitz again if you can.

A: Yal. Yal.

Q: You talked about the...

A: The selection.

Q: The hanging.

A: Yal.

Q: I'd like to know more about it. Can you...

A: Yal

Q: Tell us what happened when...why did the girls try to smuggle out gun powder and what happened and what was the reaction?

A: Yal. Well. Well, people decided that we're never going to go out alive from there. There was no question about it. They told us every day, "If the world finished 12 o'clock, 10 before 12, you be killed." That's what they tell us. But when the Russians start to come to Poland and the Germans start to lose the war, they start to take apart the crematoriums. They didn't want to see anything left. One was left. The...all the other five was done with it, so the people have to take apart. So we smelled in the air that the war eventually will come to an end, but we not going to go out alive, because that's what they told us. So the people decided they going to make uprising there. The only way...they didn't having nothing, so a lot of girls works in a union. They called the union where they maked ammunition. So the girls smuggled out "after work and they gave it to the men to through the wires you know. A lot of men came into Birkenau camps, so they put a contract. They came into work in the camp. So they gave them this ammunition. Took maybe a year to organize that. And they decided that one day they gonna cut the wires, run and kill the...few SS what they were there. Well, it wasn't the case like that because the Polish underground supposed to come to help. They never show up. You see, they never show up, so the 10 kids...soon they start to kill a couple of Germans, they put them in the oven and cut the wires, the whole sky was with airplanes, Germans. You didn't see the sky. Just airplanes. And they start to shot down the people start to run. Out you know. And then the start to investigate. They want to know how the whole thing was organized. And they start to beat up those girls who work and that only one girl broke down. She couldn't take it anymore, and she told them...she tell them to leave her alone. So she only knew the three other girls. In between those three was my girlfriend. We went to school together. Well, they beat them up in the office. I have a girl what she was a secretary there and she told them this. Stripped them naked, and they beat them up with that...how do you call it? Uh...

Q: A whip?

A: A whip. Yes. And the whip was between was steel. They whipped them up on the body and a doctor was reviving them they should tell. Well, they never told anything anymore. And then decided they're going to hang them. And that's what they did. Like in January. But 2 weeks before, they took us up on the camps, and we had to run. The Germans...because the Russians were behind, you know. And they hanged those four girls and everybody had to stay and watch it while they hang those those girls. That was the end.

Q: What happened to the men who had been involved in the uprising.

A: Well, a lot of them got killed. They start to run out from the camps and they killed them on the way. Whoever starts to run, they killed them all. You know, after all, they had the airplanes. They had ammunition. The people hadn't got nothing. But there was an uprising, but an uprising Bialystok they told me. Some of the people was there. I went to see that grave. With little things, they was hiding. People was hiding bags. The only thing even people say why the people didn't fight back. That's a very stupid question. When you having nothing in your hand, and the Gestapo stays with the...with the guns and with the dogs and they beat you up and you're hungry and you're thirsty, and you don't have a " ? How can you fight back? It's a miracle how

the " for five weeks. With hunger, with people, with sickness. Together they wanted to...to buy a gun from the Polish people. And they fought for five weeks. I'll never figure...figure out how they could do it when there was sickness and typhus and hunger. People was dying from the sickness. Nobody paid attention when somebody was dying. That's the way it was. And that's the way it was in the ghetto. Newstadt they put a big fence. People couldn't go out. People was dying. Without food. Without everything. It's...it's just a miracle somebody survived. I can't figure it out myself. People can sometimes go hungry for weeks, and that's the way they survive. But some of them can't. Some do. Some can't. People standing by...by every day in Auschwitz, you have to go up 4 o'clock in the morning, stand in the line, shivering cold, stripped until naked. That's to look for a little thing on the skin. Which we didn't have even water or anything for 7 months. They put them right on the side. And a lot of them decided, it's not...it's not worth to live. So they just touched the electric wire and they were dead. Decided it's no use to live a life like that. We're not going to go out from here anyway. So a lot of my friends did, and a lot of men did it. Suddenly, we used...we could hear the screaming through the wires in the men's camp. They beat up the men, and the screaming was fill the sky. It was a horrible situation. Nobody can...can even visualize what it was there. Unbelievable. When we came into the camp, was mud til here cause it wasn't regulated, a sidewalk " or anything. People put in a foot, they couldn't go out. One with the other the hand just to get up from the mud.. Just managed to put on the electric wires, but nothing there. But malaria and sickness and all those things. The only thing is the one day a Hanukkah. That as a horrible day. We was standing in the camp. Hanukkah. I remember that day. And they need people to gas. They didn't have any transport from the outside. I mean they cut off hundreds of people, thousands. I came back to my block. From thousand girls, only three came back. The rest was gone. They had to mark the list. That's how many have to be killed. Not one person could be missed. If they didn't have on the outside, they took from the camp. And the camp was always a lot of people. So they just cut off 500 here, 200 here, that's what they got. When they took them on the trucks to the crematorium, they just had to push one button. Like you see sometime a truck, lift that and potatoes fell down. That's how the people fell down. Every...Everything got to be fast, fast. Not to wait til they walked out. Just to push a button and the truck threw over and the people fell down like potatoes, one on top of the other. It's...it's unreal. The people doesn't even know. It's just like you put a drop in the ocean. Whatever people saying, whatever they seen in film, it's..it's just nothing compared to the reality where it was.

Q: How did you...you said that you came back from a thousand girls had been taken.

A: Yes. Only three girls. The next day there was another transport coming in.

Q: How did you escape?

A: Well, we didn't escape. They just cut us off. Oh, that came out and the mike fell out. How you put it in?

A: I didn't escape. They just cut...

Q: Wait. Wait. The tape isn't rolling yet. Okay. Now.

A: Yal. The three girls. We was afraid they're going to take us too because they took away everybody so they built like a "washroom" only holes, you know. So me and those two girls grabbed on a shovel "and we pretend to be working here, you know, because the barrack had to make room for other people coming in a couple of hours or so. So they had to make room so we kind of...I didn't think about it. My girlfriend told me, "Listen, we stay here, they're gonna take us. You see they took everybody. Let's run over there, take a shovel "and a...and a broom and see...pretend that we work here." And in time they took away lot of people you know. Everything was so fast going "down. It's hard to believe it. And the people...when they took them from the camp to the crematoriums was worse than when they took them from the train. They didn't know what's going down. Everything was fast. But when they took them from...from the camps, there was screaming and crying. You know, when you know you're going to die, then it's worse. " Yal. See everything was lying by the Germans. They always told us that we're going to work, they're going to put us in a different section. When they took in the last transport the Czechoslovakia Jews from Theresienstadt, they even opened up kindergarten for the schools, for the kids. Everything so to take away the mind that something is going to happen. They told them, "You're going to work. You're going to be in good condition. We need the people to work." In the last minute, you know, they took them to the crematorium. You saw a show. I went with my daughter to see it twice you know. So then they told them to go down to this. They say, "Why you lie to us? We want to work. Why did you do to us?" Start to beat them up and stand naked and nothing...nothing then. How...how can you fight back? So they pushed them in the crematorium with the families. That's how...all the time was lying. And with the lies, a lot of people believed it. But when we tried to tell them, you know, you're not going to go out from here alive. You see the cremator..." They says, "But look at the way they treat us here? They got special kindergarten for school. They keep the families together." So there is a sign maybe something good is going to come out. Nobody believed it. They want...they didn't want to believe it. Let's put it that way. Nobody want to believe in those things. So...everything was lying to the people. Lying. And...and that's it. And they always told us at work, don't...when they saw, the airplanes was flying. Probably American or English. He said, "Don't be so happy there was planes. We finish you up before the war." Twelve o'clock will be the war over. You will be 10 minutes before. Which they did to a lot of people. They put them in special trains. They gassed them. They...they didn't...they didn't have the time the last few weeks when the Russians was behind, you know. They didn't have many...if they had a little more time, not one person would survive. They didn't have the time to kill all of us. That was it. It hurts me when I see German now " like that. That hurts me. Even when the Germans came into our house to take away the possessions, you know what he says to me, "I was here 20 years ago, but I came back." That what I believe the Germans will do now in 20 years.

Q: I don't understand.

A: When they came into the city, they go into every house. They take away the possession, what you got. He says to me, "I was here 20 years ago in 1919, but I came back. But this time we're going to stay here." That's how you can't trust these people. One time I was walking in Auschwitz and I saw...they brought up a transport with people, men on a truck, I mean. You could see there was lawyers and doctors and writers. They way they was dressed. Sophisticated. They didn't even give them a chance to go down. Straight to the crematorium. The intelligent people didn't have a chance. If they knew somebody is well educated, they have no chance. They

finish him off. You could those doctors and lawyers between them. Everybody wished they have pills to commit suicide, but we didn't have any. Everybody would do it. But beautiful dressed. Nice, you know. And you could see. They looked around and they figure if people are working, maybe we gonna work too, you know. They thought to themselves. But that wasn't the case. Because I saw them driving up straight to the crematorium, because My block was like the third block from the crematorium. In Birkenau. I was there 2 and a half years. I couldn't believe it. I...there was people that couldn't survive 1 day. Not 1 day. It's unbelievable.

Q: How did you survive?

A: Well, I tell you something. When some people ask me that question, I only have one answer. People play on the lottery. One in 10 million wins. None of my family survived from my father's and my mother's side. Only my brother who was in Russia. Nobody. They wiped out families in our city you know. Nobody survived. Nobody. Couldn't. It...it was just a...a tragedy that...that people...only one person survived even from a city would be...would be good. It wasn't the case. They just wiped out...they were sure that they won the war, which they did won the war in Europe. Then did won the war, and they figured I'll take care of and everything you know. They took in a lot of Poles too that was well educated. I have to admit it. Everybody who was a pharmacist, a doctor, or a lawyer and come into our city, they took him immediately away to the camp because they figure intelligent people might organize themselves. And the reason they know who it was because...uh...there was a lot of " " in our city and they knew exactly the names and from everybody. So they get on the list, and that's...that's how they find out. If somebody wears a black...a black shirt, that means you are communist. They send them right away to the camp. Even in 1940 and 1939. That was a symbol they say. If you wore a black, that means you are a communist. All kind of things. It's horrible. I don't know even...even a person could survive those...those... It shows you. When I got to the doctor and I sometime and tell him...he was a survivor too, but he was hidden in Czechoslovakia. I said, "Listen, now with the medicine. Would a doctor believe I was laying with typhus without medicine, not even a little bit of ice to put in the head which I have the highest temperature...and a little bit cold water. We was laying on the floor and people was dying like crazy, and if you tell them, would they believed it? I was beaten up in the camps with a gun and blood was running. We didn't have a mirror. We didn't know how we looked. If I come home...If I came back to the block and the girls said, "Look you got so many holes in your head. So what...what...you know what the medicine was? We urine and we put in the head and we cleared it up. That was our medicine. It was always beaten up at work. Anybody. That was their pleasure, you know. That was their pleasure. That was their satisfaction to beat up anybody. And I didn't know that I was bleeding. I didn't know what's going on. I know I was beaten and I felt it, but I didn't know how I looked. Nobody know how they looked. They told me, "Listen, take a little bit urine. Wash it on the blood because " " . We was always beaten up by the Germans. Always. The look " " worse than animals. Nothing. We came back from work, you saw people laying dead. We had to bring in dead from the...from the camp...from the work. You know, like put on a stick. Two carry here and one carry here and we had to run. The dogs was after us. And we put them by their block, because they had to be counted. How many die a day. Half of them die walking. Everybody was afraid to say they're sick you know. So they was walking. Finally, they fell. Nobody could say they're sick. If you're sick or you can't work, you have no right to live altogether. That doesn't go away. I can't sleep nights. Every night I feel like I'm in Auschwitz. And I'm running. There's a selection there.

Maybe I'll stand in this, maybe I'll stand in this line. It's so real with screaming. Then when I get up in the morning, I say, "Oh, My God. I can't believe it. Everything comes back. Doesn't...doesn't let you go, you know. All those things doesn't let you go.

Q: Is there anything you want to add?

A: I...I never told my kids all this stuff, but she's very interested. She find out from the book. She made all those pictures and everything. I...I wouldn't have the guts even to do it to tell you the truth. I'm not...I come to a point I just give up a lot of things. I don't have the strength, anything. But she...she's very involved. She's going to make a " part in the house to raise money. She's in the JUF, my daughter. She's very, very much involved. She gives a lot of money. She takes that after her father, you know." She gives a lot of money. She wouldn't miss any meeting in the JUF. She organized a group. 30 people to have a meeting in her girlfriend's house." And she was running. The girl didn't left the key, "so she brought her over. In the middle of the night she was running so fast, she fell out. She couldn't go out from the car so in between was a doctor, one of her friends. So they took her to an ambulance and she ". She's running too much, and you can't be all over, but she does it. She has that energy you know.

Q: Anything else you want to tell us about Auschwitz?

A: Yal. Well, that's what I told you. It was...it was Hell. Hell on earth. Nobody ever dreamed that we ever went out from there. It was...the biggest optimist couldn't dream about that. It was...that was the finish. That was the end, and we could feel that the Russians were behind. You know they killed a lot of Russians too and they put them in the crematoriums. There were a lot of engineers by them. I think they helped the uprising too. A lot of Russian men, what they kept in the army.

Q: Did you know about the uprising?

A: Oh, sure I was there. I saw it.

Q: What did you see?

A: Well, what I couldn't see, when they took in the Germans and put them in the oven, they kill a lot of...this I couldn't see because that happened in the sonderkommander. It feel out. That happens there. But I could see the...the Germans start to running the camps and put everybody back in the barracks. The whole sky was with airplanes. Sure we saw that. It was Hell to see those things. You know, they scare all the people. So they pushed them back in...in the barracks. Of course, I saw it. I was there. I was there a long time. Even one day was a thousand years to go through that. One day was a thousand years.

Q: Okay. I want to thank you.

A: Oh, you're welcome. You're very nice to...to get out of the system. I'm very glad that I going to do that. I'll give those two books you know. I'll donate those two books.