

So we were talking about these items that your father and brother had hidden behind a stone in the cellar. And I want to jump ahead of our story a little bit, because I do know that you do come back to your home after the war.

Yes.

Did you ever find these items?

Oh, no. [LAUGH]. Well, it was a mixed thing. I am puzzled, to this day. My young uncles, who were some in labor brigade, some in concentration camp, one of them was hiding, one of them--

You know, our area got liberated by the Russians, about a month after we were taken away. You know, he was taken away in April. And May, June, the Russian army already came through. And some of these, my young uncles, were in the area where they were liberated and went home.

One of them-- and I don't know-- here's another thing-- we never asked-- one of them went to our house and down into the cellar and found the stuff.

Oh.

Now, he must-- was hidden there. I can't, to this day, figure out who told him, how did they know, what happened-- I don't know. They had some knowledge, because they found this. So I have my father's gold watch. It's not valuable to anybody but me, but, because, you know--

It's incredibly valuable.

But anyhow, my mother's earrings, yes, it was there. And so, I don't know how that happened. But in the meantime, back to the packing--

Sure.

--my parents had of an extremely busy day. And my mother was baking. My aunt was packing.

In addition to that, we had a sort of a small building on the property, where firewood was kept to the ceiling. You know, it was filled with firewood, which was a wealthy thing to have for the winter, because that was for whole winter, that, if you didn't have that, you were staying in bed all winter.

You were cold.

Cold. And we also had a bathtub, a portable bathtub, a kind of a tin bathtub, which was kept in there also. And when the children were getting baths, that was brought into the kitchen and hot water was heated and everybody had a bath. And, you know, that was our bathtub. And so, that was in there.

So, during the day, my father and brother decided to bury that tub in the little building. And they were digging and digging, and they rearranged the wood, and they were digging. And they made a hole big enough for the tub to fit in into the ground.

And then they proceeded to, in baskets, take the linens and things out of that precious closet that was there. That seemed very valuable to them.

Oh.

And I was told-- I was stationed to see how much the houses across the street from the windows there-- how much they can see that my father and brother are going back and forth, carrying a basket-- you know, a big basket.

So the neighbors would-- can they see that there's something to dig up once you're gone?

Yes. Well, to even see that something is going on. That was suspicious. Because this was already when we were given notice that we're leaving tomorrow.

So across the street, actually, was a Jewish couple-- very poor. They had a tiny, little mom-and-pop store. And and it was sort of a little higher than our street-- our yard.

I went over to the store. They sent me-- go over there and see-- stay a few minutes, and see what you can see. That might not bring on suspicion [INAUDIBLE] people who might enter the store.

So I went there and hung around a little bit. And I did see them go back and forth, but-- and I told them that. But they also covered each basket with wood. They took back wood, and so it didn't seem suspicious to me. It was activity, but the wood-- and so on, and--

OK. So, at the end, they filled it up with this closet full of beautiful linens and whatever else-- you know, household stuff that they valued. And then they had, like, a big door sitting there. They put the door on it-- covered it. Then they reiped the wood, filled with wood again and totally camouflaged and-- fine. They expected to come back, obviously, you know?

Of course, yeah.

But [? that's it ?] we were going, but don't know how long we will be gone, and don't know where we're going, but this has to be preserved when we come home-- come back. So I will tell you the end of this story, when I did come back-- I was coming back after the war, soon after, to see what was there. Talked to the neighbor.

And I said, what happened there? Because everything was gone. There was a hole. The wood was gone. Everything in the place was empty.

She said that some soldiers were billeted in our house and put horses in there-- into that place-- and that somehow the horses disturbed or got stuck or something. And they had evidence that there's something underneath. And they opened it, and they took everything. Who took it doesn't matter-- the soldiers-- it was gone, absolutely empty. That was the end of that.

But I didn't care. I didn't come to take anything. And there was no one left to worry about that.

In addition, to just finish this little episode, I also remember that my mother-- we had a lot of bedding, you know, down bedding. That was the way. And it was precious to them. And also, you know, if you come back--

So, my mother bundled up some of those big covers and pillows or whatever, tied it up, and handed it over to the neighbor over the opening in the fence. And that was that. And they finished packing. Basically, they would put things in it and fill up the suitcase or whatever-- bag-- and then-- wasn't good, they would take it out and decide that wasn't important and put something else in it.

They had an awful lot of trouble, because it filled up fast and they needed room for the food and-- anyway, it was very painful to see-- what to take, what to leave.

Yeah. Did you pack your own suitcase? Or did your parents pack everybody's?

No, I didn't have possessions [INAUDIBLE] [LAUGH]. You know, we had a few homemade toys that people made. And my older brother, he would make, you know-- they made dolls, you know, rag dolls. And my brother would make little things like a cradle for the doll and little chairs and tables-- oh, at least I thought this was just fabulous. We played with it. I mean, we had those things. But that--

You know, we were old enough to know that this is not the time [LAUGH] to worry about-- you know, children get the meaning of trouble. No, no. I had nothing I wanted to take, and neither did my older brother and sister [INAUDIBLE]. OK.

So, they were just my parents. And, after a while, I can't tell you what they thought was important. All I know is that the suitcases filled up and they had to start all over. And I was downstairs, watching my father doing this business, taking out the [? stone. ?] So I was aware of that.

So, the next morning, a delegation came to our house in preparation of us leaving-- had to leave 9 o'clock. And that was a policeman and the mayor and some elder. And they also had the school principal of the school, because he was [INAUDIBLE] Hungarian school principal, so he was-- he was-- did not turn out to be as antisemite, as I know it later. But he was an elder, important man, you know, in the town.

So they came into the house and took my father aside. And what he told us, later, was that one of them in charge said that they came to tell him that he should give them all his valuables-- money, jewelry-- anything valuable, they must have it.

Why?

Well, they did that with all Jews. They confiscated everything. And valuables were money. Oh, yeah, I mean, they kept that up all the way to Auschwitz. Because they we're not coming back. [LAUGH] And they were confiscating the house-- everything in it. The cows, the-- everything. [LAUGH] They wanted the money.

And, in the beginning, these officials either divided among them-- I found some evidence, later, that, when it became such a mass amount of people being taken out of their home-- that was especially in the cities, where there were businesspeople and people-- more wealthy Jews-- there was so much-- and artwork and whatnot-- that it was being stolen and pilfered and taken by the officials who knew the orders ahead of time and they were ready for them. But the government stepped in and began to have an inventory.

In fact, we found-- my daughters found some records. There was an inventory of what was taken from various places. It was still confiscated, and it was divided among another level of people-- not just the ones who came to the house-- but, oh, they were desperate to get all the money and valuables. It was the first thing.

And I know that my father gave them some. He did. I don't know what-- they were in a separate room. But when he came back, he said that they wouldn't leave until he gave them [INAUDIBLE]. You were a businessman; you must have. You know. So he must have given them some money [INAUDIBLE].

So, when they were gone, we were ready. It was time to leave. And-- got our stuff.

And we had a dog. And our yard was fenced in. And so, when we left-- went out, closed the door, so the dog won't follow. And we walked a short distance to this townhouse area, where there were big, empty rooms. It was, you know, conference rooms or whatever. It was the town hall. Each family.

And, as we came and found a corner-- you know, spread some kind of a blanket and put all your stuff on it, and that was our place, and the other 10 Jewish families were right behind us. And they, too-- everybody got a corner on the floor and sat down. You know, there was the [? Moscovitz ?] family-- had 10 children. And on and on.

If I count back, now, there were a total-- with all the children, there were a total of 100 members and 10 families, you know, [INAUDIBLE] this family took up 10 children, my family had 6 children, and so on. And we were left there to sit and wonder, what's next? Nobody told us anything. No what's the next step, where you're going, if you're going--

How long did you stay there?

I think we were there overnight, because I remember my mother going to the fence that this place had, and one of our Gentile neighbors, a woman who used to come to milk our cows and so on, she appeared. And I was out there, too. And my mother was talking to her through the fence.

And she had brought some butter to my mother. I remember that vividly. How she knew to come, or how she brought the-- why? You know, she milked the cows for us and all that. It was just-- I know my mother didn't communicate with her. We had no telephone or anything.

This woman knew us. She also used to come on the Sabbath to run the fire in the fireplace and [INAUDIBLE] the stove and so on. She was helping us to do the Sabbath that my mother wouldn't do. But she brought butter. And my mother had baked bread. So there was that communication.

But nobody else that I am aware of came to the fence or talked to anybody else. And the officials didn't tell us anything. I think it was the next day where horse and wagons appeared-- three or four-- I don't know how many-- lined up in front of-- on the street, there. And they said to us to get in. And we got out-- everybody hurried up to get their belongings.

And we piled in. And I don't know, at that time, whether anybody told us that we're going to Munkács or not. I don't know. But we were going to Munkács. And that was a half-a-day ride, you know? It was 30 minutes by train. And chugging along with the horse and wagons and ended up in Munkács, at the edge of the town, a wide open place.

And on it there was an abandoned brick factory, which is now well-known--

Yes. [INAUDIBLE] to find these brick factories, suitable for masses of people. And they dropped us off on the grounds.

Were there people already there?

Oh, we found out. We found out. It was filled. It was filled. But as they dropped us off, we were sort of a distance from the building. There were buildings, like lofts, that was used for the brick factory. There were, like, barracks, like-- not brick buildings, [LAUGH] actually, as I remember, but they were lofts where you had to climb up on a ladder against a wall and enter the upstairs of this loft. There were several of those in the property.

At first, we just sat there on the ground. And-- must have been late, because we ended up sleeping, the first night, outside, just there on the grounds and with our belongings. And the next day, my parents went in deeper to see what's there. We stayed-- the kids. And, of course, we watched, as people kept coming and coming from probably hundreds of little towns in that area.

And I should note-- later, from recent, after that, there were something like 12,000 people in that ghetto. I mean, it was-- and there was another big factory in Munkács, from what I understand now. And then there was a ghetto for the Munkács Jewish residents, where they blocked off a street or several streets, where the local Jewish population was ghetto-- [INAUDIBLE] enclosed ghetto, there. And the other two ghettos were filled with the people from the regions.

Did you see any officials?

No, we didn't see any. There were Jewish appointed overseers, so to speak, you know, young men who were in charge of the crowds, in charge of where you should go, telling people what to do. They were, like, the Jewish police-- that they needed these people to help them out with it. It worked very well, because, if it's done all by [INAUDIBLE] police and soldiers, there's much more tension. Through your own people, it's a calming thing, and-- you know, they did that in Auschwitz, too, a lot, and all the camps.

So, they went and came back and said, we're moving into one of the buildings-- picked our stuff up, and we've moved on. And it was, I remember, climbing up a ladder that led to a very big opening in this loft. It was already full of people. Again, everybody picked a corner on the floor.

And, pretty soon, it was filled, and there was a passage left in the middle to walk back and forth. But you could only get

to that little passage by stepping over to people and then continue in or out. So that was--

Were there any toilet facilities or anything?

Nothing. Certainly not. No water, no toilet [INAUDIBLE]. That proceeded.

There were a lot of young people-- teenagers and young men-- not old enough for the labor brigade-- young women-- teenagers, basically-- who-- I don't know whether these Jewish police helpers told them what to do, but in no time they were digging a ditch that was going to be the toilet. And the ditch was-- if you got up in the loft and looked down, you looked right into the ditch and everything that happened thereafter.

So, there was this big ditch. And on all the four edges around, there was, like, logs-- sit on-- you know, not like a board where you could sit out-- logs.

But just a log. Mhm?

Oh. Just unimaginable. And that became the toilet. And, as I say, of course there was no water. And there was no facilities or soap, toilet paper-- never mind. And you had here a civilian population of very old, very sick, very young-- infants, pregnant women-- everybody, mixed together-- men, women--

This is how, from out of your own home and privacy, in a matter of-- as I said, three weeks after the Germans occupied Hungary, that we were subjected to--

And nobody tells you-- there is no one telling you why you're there, how long you'll be there--

No, no, no, absolutely not. Absolutely not. And there was-- a kind of life began, there, with the help of these Jewish guys. They were organizing various groups to do certain chores that nobody else did, you know, to keep the thing functioning.

Pretty soon, they arranged to take out the dead into the Jewish community that was a city ghetto in Munkács--

Did you see this?

I did, because, unfortunately, my precious aunt was killed there. We thought she died there, but we now had evidence that they killed her because she came in sick. And we saw her carried out, by the Jewish group that was assigned to do that. And--

So she--

It was a very-- that's a very sad story that happened, pretty soon. That happened after, before they were ready to take us to Auschwitz. And we thought that she died of natural causes. But, when we got to Auschwitz and we realized the killing was in full force, they were not about to send sick people in the train. They already knew what to do with sick people, right in the ghetto.

So, when you had left your home, your aunt was with you, in the town hall. And she was with you when--

Oh, yeah, she was-- she was with us. She was with us, on the floor. And what happened--

She was about 55 years old. And, for a long time, she had-- what my aunt Rose and older people told us, after the war, that she probably had cancer. But nobody talked about cancer. And [INAUDIBLE] back and forth to the hospital, not in Munkács but in the other big city, Beregszász, that had a hospital. And I know that, periodically, she went for some treatment there.

And she was sick. And lying on the floor, there, made her very, very unhappy and uncomfortable. And they had a little

infirmery. The Jews were-- well, we thought that an infirmery meant there is a doctor and that it's like a hospital. But the Germans did that in every camp that I was in, starting with the ghetto. And we discovered that--

Excuse me. Is something moving? Because I'm hearing a sort of swishing sound.

OK, I must move it away again. So, she could not function on the floor. My father put her into this little infirmery, where there was a bed-- maybe for two people-- something like that.

And my sister Serena and I would regularly go see her-- you know, go in [INAUDIBLE] we were not kept out. And we would talk to her, and she said she better sleeping in a bed.

And my parents thought that that was a good decision. And then, one day, my sister went there and I went there. And she was in bed, but she was dead. And, you know, the day before, she wasn't dead.

And, of course, we still thought she died, because she--

Yeah, naturally.

How would ever, who could ever think of anything else? But we put two and two together. And then, when we were in the train on the way to Auschwitz, and understanding that our fate is in great jeopardy and that we're suffering in the way they transported us and took everything away from us, and I realized that we were in deep trouble.

I remember my parents and others saying that [? Laney ?] [INAUDIBLE] called her-- that [? Laney ?] it was a saint, to die before she had this experience, that God did her a favor, better than for us, that she had a chance to die and not suffer what we were suffering. So they too thought she died.

So how did you find out otherwise?

When we got to Auschwitz. And even then, when we got to Auschwitz, we didn't know where we were. We found out from the prisoners who had come before us, when we asked them, when is the reunion with our families-- because we were separated from our families, upon arrival.

So we said, so, when is the reunion? And they pointed to the chimneys and told us what happened to them when they arrived. And we thought, well, you people are crazy. You people-- what have they done to you, here, that you speak like that?

Mmm.

Dismiss that-- everybody dismissed that.

But this is a second issue. This is a second issue about Auschwitz. What I'm interested in, is did you ever get factual proof that [? Laney ?] was killed in Munkács at the brick factory?

Well, nobody told us that. But we came back from Auschwitz, and we realized that, while in the ghetto, we were marginalized in every way and disrespected and humiliated and not cared for and not fed and not provided for, and that this-- they had maybe two people in that infirmery, that-- they were-- those in charge knew where they're sending us. And here was a sick person. Were going to put her on a stretcher into the thing?

We just put 2 and 2 together, realizing that we were in a death factory. We were not there for work, temporary work. We were there in a genocidal place, and it started there.

OK.

Now, I don't have--

[INAUDIBLE] from your telling me, I could see how this whole disruption and tearing away from one's home could have sped her death-- you know, if you're a sick person already--

True.

--then, yeah, that-- then these circumstances and these conditions are going to exacerbate everything that is already weakening your system.

Quite possible. But what was even more unbelievable is that when, after Auschwitz, I came home, the neighbors came out-- the Gentile neighbors-- to greet us coming back-- those who came back. One of them said to me, we heard-- they called her [? Laney ?]-- we heard that [? Laney ?] died. And I was stunned.

It seems that BÃ³rky was notified that [? Laney ?] died. And I thought, how can that be?

Well, that's-- yeah.

This actually happened. So, it seems that, between the Hungarian government and the Jewish agency-- [INAUDIBLE] the Jewish young guys who took her to the Jewish cemetery-- somehow, her whole town was notified. Which maybe comes closer to maybe what you were saying. But, after being in Auschwitz, and I saw the just mass killing, and they brought them there to be killed, I can also be right.

Yeah. No, no, no. Listen-- when I'm asking this, I am not doubting what you're saying.

Yeah, I understand.

What I was wondering is just-- I can see how you would-- I can see your logic to it, but there's the actual fact of a person-- let's say she's in the infirmary, and she could be injected with something, which is an active step.

Yeah. I think that's what they did. Knowing what I know, that killing was the aim and the plan-- but in the train, when I heard people say that it was a blessing that she died, I kind of-- listening to it and seeing what my parents were-- and all of us were-- experiencing-- it made sense, you know, that thought she died.

So [INAUDIBLE] don't know exactly what happened, but the fact that the town was notified was-- I am sure the town was not notified when my whole family was murdered, You know?

Yes. Yes. Yes.

But this was still in the Jewish community, where there was a Jewish ghetto run by Jewish people. You know-- Judenrat-- [INAUDIBLE] the Jews managed this.

So you saw [? Laney ?] being taken out, together with others--

Again, the Jewish group provided a coffin. And by the time I saw her next-- I saw her dead in bed, yes, for [INAUDIBLE] an instant. But, by the time-- then they provided-- the Jewish community in Munkács, it was in ghetto, but they had certain abilities to do-- to bury their own-- they sent a coffin. And when these young guys came to take the coffin away on a horse and buggy, my father and I and Serena-- I don't think-- my mother was probably with the little kids. My father came-- we all came there, stood by the coffin, and my father said a certain prayer. I understand it's some Jews' relatives do, to [? honor ?]. You know, it's sort of a prayer and also asking for forgiveness-- something like that-- it's a prayer like that.

Is it Kaddish?

And maybe it was Kaddish, too, yes. Somebody told me that it includes the prayer of, in general, saying goodbye and

hoping that they forgive for all-- if there were any sins, you know. I don't know, but somebody told me that.

But my father was saying the prayer. And then the coffin was taken away.

And how long did you stay in Munkács, in this loft-like situation?

Yeah. Well, people make a general statement, from people who there-- they say four weeks. I think it was under four weeks-- so, between three and four weeks. And that's a long time--

It is.

--to deprive and to live in a mass community of people without the needs being met. And it got worse and worse, because the food was short-- was gone, in no time. And it--

Again, the food was supplied by the Jewish ghetto in the city. It seems from-- this is all I know, later-- that they allowed those Jews in the ghetto to go out to the city market, after the general population took all that they took-- and after it was closed off to them, then the ghetto people were able to go out and buy things for the ghetto.

And what happened was-- how we were fed, that, from what I understand, that those ghetto people were in charge somehow to cook. What they brought in was a huge kettle of soup, every day. And it was brought in by these Jewish people in charge. And it had to come from that ghetto, because-- I don't-- I might be wrong, but who else would-- you know, it seemed like they brought it from the ghetto, and then it was distributed, once a day, to us in this ghetto. And [INAUDIBLE]--

What they did is, they would give each family a ladle of soup for each member in the family. You know, my mother took out a pot and held it out, and that's how-- that was-- and there was some kind of a bread. That was it. And then soon we were getting hungry already before we were sent off.

Of course.

And, of course, the bathroom facility, and the constant harassment-- now, here, they abused the men. They called-- I remember, in the middle of the night, you know, up in this loft-- very dark, and people are sleeping on the floor. All of a sudden, shouting, yelling-- all the lights went on. And people-- soldiers, men, don't know whom-- yelling, screaming, get up, get up. All men under 16, get out, get out, get out. You know? And waking people. And people begin to get up and make their way to the exit.

And I remember my father lying there on the floor, my six-year-old brother on the floor-- and my mother-- so-- so clever. She threw a blanket on both of them, and she said, don't move. Don't go.

And I also remember that anything like that made me tremble. What if-- what if they come and find him? They will really beat him. They will punish him. And I had many instances like that, that I would rather comply than what the outcome would be [LAUGH] if they found that you didn't comply.

So, it was very terrible. But, you know, it was like an impulse on someone to do something cruel. After a while, you know, a lot of men left, the lights went out, and what they did is interrogate them, demand money, beat them up, and disrupt their peace. And they wandered back, and it was over, you know? And so my mother understood that, somehow. So--

But you're telling me this, I'm having in mind an image of a young girl who is 13 and 1/2 years old.

Yeah.

And there's a certain kind of stage of life that children go through, and the ages of 12 and 13 are very-- they're very tender. You know? You're on the cusp of being a teenager, but you're still in many ways a child. And to be frightened to



one's boots, the way this sounds like, I mean, had you ever had such fear before? You know, do you remember the moment--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Yeah, do you remember the moment when you thought, I'm terrified. And I've never known what "terrified" means.

Yeah, yeah. Well, there were some incidents I had with my father when we were still at home. But I agree-- just to back up a little bit-- that I'm-- in my real old age, I began to see that my reaction to that whole experience is different from my sister's. And I always wondered why. First of all, she was 17. She was, by the calendar, 3 years and 10 months older-- so, practically almost 14.

Yeah.

And-- no, I'm sorry-- I'm confusing. She was practically 4 years older than I.

Yes. And I was always much more terrified in Auschwitz than she was. I came back, after, much more affected emotionally than she is. And I know that-- not that she wasn't affected. But I was affected in just the way you say-- like a child. And she was more like a teenager and more independent, not clinging to her parents the way I did or, later on, to my aunt Rosie.

Well, I was just going to say-- that the need of a 13-year-old girl for her mother is much greater than that of a 17- or an 18-year-old girl for her mother.

Yeah.

It's developmental.

She was pulling away already, you know. And I was-- that's why I didn't want to stay in Munkács with my uncle and family-- to stay there in school, and she wanted to stay there. You know, I would take the train back every day. Was ridiculous thing to do, in every way. But I was adamant-- I'm not staying. I couldn't. You know--

It's what you needed. It's what you needed, for your peace of mind.

Yeah, yeah. And I didn't understand that, but I never could see why I was-- well, I now understand myself better. But, to this day-- I'm almost 90-- I am still clinging to my parents. And you may think that that's impossible. But--

No.

--I am. [LAUGH] I'm still 13 years old.

Yeah. I mean, I-- I have heard this, I have seen this--

Really.

--yeah-- I have seen this, and it's heartbreaking. It's absolutely heartbreaking, because--

It is.

--yeah. you're caught-- these things overwhelm your life, at a point where you don't have the-- no one has. Because developmentally it doesn't happen. You don't have that inner resource that a young adult does. There's a vulnerability, there. And children-- so, you know, children experience these things in one way, and someone who is 12 or 13 is in that in-between--

It's sort of like a little deer who is born and is getting its legs, you know, and is standing up? But they're still a little shaky on those legs. That's how I see a 13-year-old.

Well, I thought that I was brave. I--

You probably were. You probably were.

I certainly never complained, because I understood. But I watched my sister, after-- as she became 20, by the time we got to this country, and I was 16. And I just know that she went through the same thing I did but-- I am much more affected. There's no doubt. You know.

So, when you tell me about seeing Aunt [? Laney ?], I mean, that's going from a normal life to being thrust in-- you know, within a matter of days, into a world that is surreal and cruel and dangerous.

Oh, yes. And very worried for my parents. I trembled for them and for the other children. I was so frightened, something will happen to them. And, you know--

And my mother covered him up, and-- don't go-- I was worried that they'll find him and hurt him, if he doesn't go. If he goes, they'll hurt him. If he stays, they find-- they'll hurt him. It was just terrifying.

Yeah, yeah.

But they didn't-- in that instance, they did not find him.

No. They didn't search. They couldn't come up into this mob of--

Ah.

--people, covering the entire floor. They just shouted at the opening-- get out, get out-- and the lights were on.

I see. I see.

But you have to, I think, still give my mother credit. She was-- well, she was an adult, and she understood, [LAUGH] and I'm just-- what is she doing? What is she doing? Maybe she should let him go.

No, she knew not to let him go. That was the danger-- to let him go, you know?

So were these just hooligans? Or were these quasi officials, who came and shouted and interrogated?

[INAUDIBLE] already the hooligans in charge could do anything they wanted to. And mostly, they humiliated them. First they demanded money, and then they humiliated them in the way they-- nobody stopped them. And then, they beat up some of them. And--

In other words, it was an exercise of cruelty, for no reason. You know, and they did that a lot. In the camps, they did it daily, hourly, to the men-- and to the women, too.

[INAUDIBLE] I was saying that, [INAUDIBLE] in the ghetto, there were always announcements to control the crowd and move them here and there and give orders and-- you know, but basically, it was just people mingling around on the grounds. And it was it was a terrible thing, because there were-- [INAUDIBLE] we never--

I don't think I ever got out of my clothes. We slept in our clothes, on the floor. I don't think I-- don't remember ever even washing my face or hands. I don't. I remember some of those things in Auschwitz, later, but not here.

And then-- you said 13-- I got my period for the first time, there.

Well, I was-- you know, it's such a personal question, but it did cross my mind. And, what happens then, for a young girl?

Well, it was one of those disasters. [LAUGH] I don't know what else to call it. I had no facility. The toileting was out in the open, with all kinds of people-- older, younger.

My mother tore up some rags and gave them to me. And those rags were with me the entire time of the lasting of the period. And, going to the bathroom, I don't even know--

You know, after a while, necessity-- [LAUGH] you have to do something, and you do it. But it was a terrible experience. And my mother couldn't help me-- couldn't do anything about it. [INAUDIBLE] just-- and didn't wash, didn't have toilet facilities, didn't-- she didn't talk to me about it. She just handed me a rag, and-- [LAUGH]

Did-- excuse me, to ask this--

--somehow, I'm here.

--did you know what was happening to you? Were you aware of what this meant?

I must have known. I must have known that-- I had an older sister-- I don't know. I really don't know. I wasn't surprised. I wasn't surprised, in that respect, somehow. But I didn't keep track of when it happens or that it's about to happen.

Well, it's also-- you know, a lot of people have said that, when there is extreme stress and trauma, women lose their monthly cycles. And--

Well-- yeah. Well, I can tell you about that. First of all, now that I experienced that at 13, there were thousands of women in that loft, and all around in the ghettos, where they naturally had their periods. And undoubtedly, they had very similar experiences to mine, except they had had it before and knew more about it.

But when we got to Auschwitz-- I need to complete this episode-- that, almost immediately, all the women stopped menstruating-- and I stopped. But I know my aunt Rosie, who was 25-- her sister was 27-- I know the women were saying-- the women were saying-- Rosie and others-- I heard it, you know, the conversation. They said, they're feeding us something here to make this happen-- put it in the stuff we get-- the soup that we get, and that, who knows if we will ever be able to have children? I remember the older girls saying that-- we will never have children.

Oh.

They didn't [INAUDIBLE] menstruation. So I was-- you see, I was 13, but I was tuned into an awful lot of conversation.

Yeah. Yeah. I see that.

And a lot of it might not have been as clear to me as it is, after-- as it has become, after. But I heard a lot of stuff. And that, I clearly heard. I somehow didn't connect having a menstruation with not being able to have children. But, you know, sooner or later. But nobody had-- nobody menstruated for the entire time we were in Auschwitz.

Yeah.

And now I hear, over and over-- I've made inquiries-- Doctors, so on, others say no, they didn't feed you anything to make that happen-- that it happened from what you say-- stress and trauma.

Stress and trauma.

Yeah, and so I-- that's a surprise to me. I was convinced, and they were, too, that we were being fed something so that

they would not have to bother with that aspect of the women by the thousands. You know, I thought they just put an end to that for their own convenience.

Well, thank you for sharing this. I mean, it's personal, and yet it is something that is such a human function. And it's part of what the story is. It's part of, what do people go through when they are targeted in this way and have these types of experiences and policies imposed on them? You know, that is part of what they experience.

Yeah. Oh, of course. And other humiliation. And, you know, the whole gamut of hunger. Hunger is another [INAUDIBLE] that I can write a book about-- what happens to you when--

When you're hungry.

--not hunger but starvation. [LAUGH] You know? But, in addition to that, there were periods-- jumping ahead-- where we were infested with lice, where we had no way of washing up in any way, when you know, you just-- the sanitation-- the ordinary things that human beings need, to survive, and the cold and just, the crowding and-- you know. I can "boast" [LAUGH] of having been infected with lice, having bedbugs, having [LAUGH] starved, you know, having been looked at as subhuman, on and on. And--

Do you-- yeah. Mhm?

[INAUDIBLE] had to be dealt with, somehow.

Yeah. Do you have a number? Were you tattooed a number?

I got a number in Auschwitz. Yes, I did. And many, many years later, in this country, after I already had two kids, and-- well, a little before-- I had a lot of attention played to it, by people-- tattooing was unheard-of, in those days.

And I was in my late teens. And people asked me, what's that? What's that? Is that your phone number? You know, what is that about?

And I could not talk about it. It didn't have a simple answer. You couldn't tell Americans-- normal people-- well, I was in Auschwitz and they did that to me. That didn't satisfy. [LAUGH]

I had a neighbor, at the time. She said, you know, I have this surgeon. He will take it off you, and you won't have to suffer having to answer the questions.

It was all about my inability to talk about it, but it was very, very upsetting. It made my heart pound and sweat in to my palms. I just could not deal with the subject.

And so I did. I went to this surgeon. And he cut it out. And I have a scar. He cut it out and stitched it.

And my sister didn't do that, and hers is quite a bit faded, but you can still tell, you know, but-- yes, that's what happened to mine. I remember the number and so on.

What is the number?

[INAUDIBLE] It was-- the Hungarians, usually, that were coming in at that time-- it started with an A, dash, 6236. 6236.

Yes. And my sister's would be 6237, you know, she was right next to me.

What reminded me of that question was when you were saying you have lice, you have-- all of this is dehumanization. All of this is taking someone from a normal world and thrusting them into Dante's hell. And--

Yeah?

--and the steps that are-- and the various factors that contribute, some of which are proactive and some of which just come with the territory, like the lice--

Yeah.

--like the bodily, physical needs that are not being met, that-- you know, all of that you have described to me, and having a number being your identifier is one part of that process.

Oh, yeah.

It's-- you can't imagine, again-- I mean, again, thrusting yourself back into a normal world, where people don't know about such things. And then, you're at a cocktail party and somebody asks you, what's that number, what are you supposed to do? [LAUGH] You know? What do you do with that?

You cannot open that subject casually.

No.

You cannot. It's-- you know, and this was-- I was much younger, actually. I was going to school [INAUDIBLE]. I guess I-- maybe my idea that it was after-- no, I was [INAUDIBLE]-- the biggest-- well, I had it, after, too. But in school, when I entered American high school, that's when I was exposed to all the light, funny questions, when students thought-- other girls-- thought I could not just-- they had no idea-- they probably would have thought I was crazy or thought making up stories. To me, it was very painful to talk about it, at that point.

Were there years that you did not talk about these things?

Oh, all of us-- my sister-- all of us-- oh, at least 20 years, we didn't. No, no, we couldn't. We couldn't. No, it was too raw. It was to-- how to begin? How to explain? How to--

And people were not ready to understand it really, in this country. And even today, or later-- no, no, they-- it's some kind of a weird experience, that probably we are exaggerating, and things like that, you know? No, it was--

You know, if you just say, in kind of cold, simple sentences, what happened-- doesn't make sense. [LAUGH] not at all.

Yeah. Yeah.

It's something that cannot be absorbed as other than some weird person making up some stories.

Well, I hate to-- I-- the first thing that comes to my mind is that poor Polish lady who escaped the pits in Poland and comes to your town. And your lives were normal, then. You hadn't known what it was like. You know? And you heard it, and, very well meaning-- but it's not part of the reality that anybody can recognize in a normal world, and so they doubt it.

Yes. Well, [INAUDIBLE], it's a well-documented thing, that a person came from the ghetto-- this Jan Karski?

Oh, Jan Karski, of course, the Polish underground--

Nobleman, yeah. He snuck into the ghetto, to find out-- the Polish ghetto, in Warsaw. And then, he came to this country and met with government officials, to tell them what he saw, and they wouldn't believe it. And apparently, he spoke to Supreme Court Justice Frankfurter.

Yeah.

And Frankfurter said, I see that you are-- I'm paraphrasing, for sure-- that you are a fine young man, an incredible young man, but, sir, I don't believe you.

Yeah.

Something to that effect-- that Jewish Supreme Court justice-- you know, he came to tell him, and he said, I don't believe you, even though I think you're a nice person.

And all of that is part of the post-- the after story, if you survive, you know, what we've talked about. I want to go back to Munkács. When you get to this brick factory, do you recognize the part of town you were in? Because you've been to Munkács.

Ever? You mean, after, or-- or--

I'm saying, when you've come-- when you've been deported from your home, and you're in Munkács brick factory for three weeks-- or plus-- in that loft, when you were brought there do you know what part of Munkács you were in, what neighborhood you were in?

Well, I know I'm in Munkács. But this is outside the city. The factory was-- after the war, I went, and I still wouldn't [LAUGH] know where I was, compared to the city. But it wasn't in the city like when I went to school. It was in a, you know, a regular city, from the railroad station. This was in the outskirts-- like, if you went outside of Washington, in some industrial area. But we-- my parents-- we all knew we were in Munkács. [INAUDIBLE]

You mentioned, earlier, that there was more than one brick factory. That's why I ask, because I'd like to know if this had an identifier. The place that you were, was it identified as a particular name for that brick factory?

Yes, you know, it was, by who owned it, by the name of the owner. And I can't even remember that. I didn't know that there were two until recent years. I always said "the" big brick factory." And somebody at the Holocaust museum said, you know, there was another one. And this was named so-and-so, and that was named so-and-so. But--

And after the war, actually, we went back to the brick factory. And, even then, there were a couple of buildings there, but there was really nothing there anymore. And it was just fields, you know? And-- I don't know-- some buildings left. But it was not in the city at all, but it was Munkács.

Was it close to the railway station?

No, but they were very clever. The Germans never-- they were organized, prepared, and-- for their needs, not for our needs. But, for their needs, they were organized.

So the brick factory [LAUGH] we were in had a railroad siding in it.

Ah. I see.

They knew what they were doing.

(EMPHASIS) We didn't know that a train would arrive there and take us. You know, it was sort of overgrown, in the grass. But one day, when they were ready to take us, a huge train-- cattle car-- showed up, right there. We didn't have to go far. They knew what they were doing.

I see. So right there is where you're taken on to the train. You're told to get onto it.

Yes. And, you know, because they did it so cleverly, the general population didn't necessarily know what was

happening at the moment. I mean, trains went through, later on, and through cities and stations of every kind. But we were locked in in cattle cars, and--

I mean, a lot of people say, we didn't know. A lot of it is believable, because (EMPHASIS) we didn't know, and we were affected. We didn't know.

With all that you knew there, these are the things you didn't know.

[INAUDIBLE] the real thing, we didn't know. [INAUDIBLE] I'm reading a lot about this topic-- how the Jewish leadership kept it from us, because they felt that it was too late. In 1944, they knew exactly about Auschwitz and where we were going. They felt it was too late to alert us, because it would just-- it was-- there was no more escape from it, and that it would cause greater pain to tell us than not tell us. I disagree.

I wanted to ask you-- what do you think of that, that kind of logic?

No. No. No. No, because a lot of people would have been killed anyway, but a lot of people would have scattered in way that the Germans would have had a harder time with their very well-planned, well-organized people who didn't resist and didn't complain, and we went to the slaughter, [INAUDIBLE] we got right to the door of the gas chamber, without knowing where we were going. We should have [INAUDIBLE]--

There were small numbers of people in the leadership and beyond that that knew, but they kept it. They kept it a secret. No. I think even my parents-- although, there was even some talk, just before we left our house, that maybe Serena and I-- I remember my mother saying, well, maybe we should try to leave you with some of the Gentiles in the town. And, of course, both Serena and I said, no, no, no-- but I was violently opposed, [LAUGH] for the reasons we just talked about.

But the preparation wasn't made. And it would not have worked in a small town. Everybody knew us. [LAUGH] We didn't look like the rest of them, and so on.

But, had my mother known what would happen, yes, she would have, even at that point, insisted. Because somebody would have stayed. Something different would have happened, even--

Well, you'd have more control over your fate. The knowledge--

Yes.

--would have given you maybe a sliver of a choice.

Absolutely. And people who did know in the leadership-- and it's well-documented-- there are books written about it-- they took their own families out in time, you know those who knew. And so, they have been vilified for that. And I don't think that they have ever won that battle, you know, [INAUDIBLE].

There are names-- people-- it's known who said what and why and what happened.

Tell me-- were you amongst the first transports out of Munkács, or somewhere in the middle, or how in the sequence?

Well, I think we were the first train out of that ghetto. And I don't know [INAUDIBLE] post-- that there were many, many trains coming from Munkács, because there were about 10,000 Jews. And so, they kept coming. And the last were the Munkács city Jews who came from the regular ghetto. They were the last to come, from what I know now. So--

I'm kind of thinking, this must have been sometime in May of '44? Would that be right-- sort of, like, springtime? If Passover was-- the last day of Passover is when you get the word that you have to leave your home?

[INAUDIBLE] it was in-- we went to the ghetto in April, and we left for Auschwitz in May.

OK.

Towards the end of May.

What was--

This was well-documented.

Your journey-- what do you remember, from the train?

Oh, I would tell you, but one thing, back into Munkács ghetto, with the way we were living there, like animals. The Jewish agencies actually who helped run it, they were wanting to prevent typhus. Lice is always common in a crowded, unsanitary place.

So there was an announcement. There were always announcements. You go here, you go there, don't go here, don't do this-- you know, always orders, shouted. There was this order shouted, for all to hear, that girls under 16 have to have their hair cut and report to such-and-such a place on the grounds there, or your fathers will be punished. Well, that's all I had to hear.

And so, I had long hair, at the time, and mostly in braids. And I was roaming around outside, in the daytime. My mother was with the little kids. Serena was helping-- there were teenagers doing some other things. They were-- it's another story. They helped out with the kindergarten-age kids.

I was roaming around. I ran right to that tent, sat down, and they cut my hair. And other girls showed up, too, like me and-- cut the hair. So I went back to the barrack where my mother was. And she took one look at me and-- wasn't crying or anything, and I wasn't crying or anything, it was-- it was the way, you know, you say, oh, well, this I can withstand. The hair will grow back, [LAUGH] you know?

I was not upset, because my father would be punished. So, she gave me a kerchief. She wore a kerchief. Her head was covered all the time.

Oh, OK.

Because she was a orthodox Jewish woman whose hair was cut when she married. You know that custom.

Yes.

So I never saw her without a scarf. So she had some, and she gave me one. I put it on. And, from then on, till I arrived in Auschwitz, I wore a kerchief.

And the reason I tell you this-- because, as the story unfolds-- and you might have read about some of these things-- that saved my life. My first chance to live was the fact that I had a kerchief on and my hair was cut. So that was very important.

Was your hair shaven, or was it just cut short?

Well, I think it was just cut with a scissor. I used to think-- you know, these are fuzzy-- a little fuzzy. Because [LAUGH] I must have been under tension.

Yeah.

I think it was a scissor, cut close, so that I now look bald, or just with a little-- not down to the-- like a clipper-- wasn't a



clipper. Because, you know, they had to cut off the braids and all the other hair. And there was just a little bit above the skull.

Like it could be like a boy's haircut.

Right. Maybe like a Jewish boy's [LAUGH] haircut-- really short. And, of course, I needed a kerchief-- no doubt about it. I wasn't-- that was being bald-- was short.

Mhm? So you were in the train, with the kerchief. And--

Yes?

--your mother wears a kerchief?

Oh, yeah.

And in what way does this save you?

Oh. So, see, we don't know what's happening to us whatsoever.

Yeah, you're in the trains. And my question had been, do you have memories of what that trip was like?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. So now, every step of the way from being taken out of our home to taking our stuff away to living in the ghetto, being hungry, being humiliated, being dirty, being everything else, all the time we think we're still in our hometown area. We're still nearby, and things will change.

We knew that-- this-- they hoped-- everybody always looked to see for some miracle. We're still in the Munkács. Now, the train starts going. And my father is looking out the little window of this cattle car, deliberately looking to see whether-- and he knows the terrain-- whether the train will turn towards Poland or turn towards Hungary.

And the minute it turned towards Poland, he announced it. And everybody was waiting for that announcement. Because now, we heard that what that young woman said and others, since then-- that, when you cross the border into Poland, the Nazis are waiting for you and they mow you down. That's what we heard. We didn't believe it. But now, are we going towards Poland? Yes.

OK.

This is where the mood in the train changes entirely. This is where everybody's silent-- totally silent-- because now we're going across the border, and we will be machine-gunned, all of us. And nobody's talking. But this is what is understood.

And so, there is no more hope. We can't say that we're still in our neighborhood and probably [INAUDIBLE] can turn around.

Yeah.

So, it's a very terrible thing, what happens in the train. But silence-- really-- grief. grief-stricken silence. You know, the women looking at their children, and so on. And so, that's what we're expecting now.

So, when the door opens finally, in Auschwitz, and the screaming and yelling-- get out, get out, get out-- and-- leave everything behind-- and my father says, I-- I see barracks here, and I see prisoners in striped uniform. This is not the forest of Auschwitz. This is a labor-- a work camp, a labor camp-- everybody's happier-- much happier.

Oh, we're not going to be mown down. This is a labor camp. Everybody says, well, it could be worse, right? We're

saved.

This is the mood. Everybody jumps out-- leaves everything behind. And thousands of people now on the platform. The crowd is--

Then, orders, orders-- shouted-- orders-- almost immediately, have to leave everything behind. And so now we have nothing but what we are wearing. And so my mother quickly says to the kids, put on layers. Put on more stuff-- clothes. Because it's cold out there. This is early-- it's May. It's cold-- cold, just like now.

And so, we all put on something big-- a coat. And I had a very big coat, which I hated desperately. But that was my coat. That was made for me by a tailor, out of a coat that belonged to my grandfather who died-- a man's--

Your father's father.

[INAUDIBLE] It was hanging there for years. And my mother could no longer buy wool cloth, like she did in better days, and have me made-- a tailor made it. She didn't have the winter-type cloth-- wool, particularly.

And she took me to Munkács, with that coat, because that's where the tailors were. And she sat there and said-- and always said those things, when the seamstress made anything for us-- it has to be long, it has to be big, it has to-- she has to grow into it. [LAUGH] And when she's finished, her sister will get it.

And so that coat came practically down to my ankle. It was-- I'm-- excuse me, I'm having a robocall.

OK.

I'll--

I'll-- I'll stop.

[INAUDIBLE]