

According to [NON-ENGLISH], it's too late for our parents, for my sisters, for my brothers, and for all the dead. It's too late for me and my fellow survivors. But maybe it's not too late for our children. And that's why I am here to speak to you, in the hope that when you teach, this you should keep in mind.

When the war really started, and all the concentration camps and all the deportations, I was 16 years old. And I was in junior high. And really, I didn't take it seriously at the beginning. I thought this can't happen, will happen. Maybe Poland will be occupied as a country. But after all, the culture and the civilization, and the high arts which were in Germany were never permitted. So we should be heard.

However, since it turned in a different way. In 1940, the heavy boots came into a little town where I was living. Initially, I was born in a little village. And my parents had a mill, a flour mill, with a turning wheel, very old-fashioned. And I was raised in a very happy, happy environment. And I was quite a type happy-go-lucky too on top of it.

In 1940, after the Nazis marched into our town, all kind of rules and regulations came. First of all, we had to move out from our home. And we all living in one little room, let's say maybe 10 or 12 people together. Food was scarce. And at times, we had to wear our band and the star. At times, I was taking off the band, and I was just going out. We had some friends with the Polish people, and could buy some food, some meager supplies of food for the whole family.

Somehow, I don't know how I did it. Maybe I was the youngest in my family, and maybe I didn't have the maturity yet to be scared or to be worried. So usually, I was the one that undertook all those expeditions.

As the time went on, unfortunately things got worse. We started listening to things like this. You are going into a destination that you're never returned. However, we couldn't believe it. And this was a part of denial. We didn't believe it. Because sometimes, some postcards arrived. I don't know where was it from before maybe the people were boarded on the train.

And they were saying we are going to working camp. But some sentences caused us to understand we would never see them again. One day in '42, the situation looked very, very bleak. And my parents took me and my sister, two sisters and three brothers, and everybody went to the cemetery. And to our amazement when we came there, the whole population of the city was there. And we were praying to the dead and to God, to the dead so they should be our messengers to God. They should try to save us.

We saw already what's happening. The next day, as I went to the forced labor, which what I was leaving around 7 o'clock in the morning. And I came back around 4:00. While we were marching back, I heard already don't go back to the city, because nobody is left there. I couldn't believe it. But we really didn't go back.

The last time I saw my parents and my sisters and my brother, this was the last morning. Never again did I see them. I didn't know really where to go. I started to wander in a direction that I thought maybe some friends, Polish people, were living. And two young men approached me. And they asked me where am I going. Of course, I told them I'm going to visit an aunt. She is ill. Somehow they said that I am lying. We walked [NON-ENGLISH], they asked me who I am. I told them my real name. And they said they knew my father.

They want to help me. They want to save me. And that's why they were there. A whole night we were marching, because there was shooting, and heavy shooting. And they didn't know what to do with me. One went with me to his sister. But she refused to let me in. The other one tried too. Finally we found a heap of hay. And this is where they buried me, on the top of that heap. I stayed there a whole week in that heap.

And every second day, 2:00 AM in the morning, they were bringing me a bottle of milk, two slices of bread, or whatever. But at the end maybe, the sixth or seventh day, it was critical because the farmer came and he started taking off the hay. And I felt one minute more, he's going to discover me. So the next day, we went out from there. I went to a bigger city to Krakow. And I had forged papers, not anymore under my real name.

And I was looking for employment. And I was totally left alone No more, no more family, and I couldn't hang on to

anybody, and just running scared. After maybe two months, I was arrested by the Gestapo. I spent maybe two months there, being beaten severe. Being beaten very badly, and every time whoever came back let's say from the cell, it was just flesh and blood beaten all over.

After that, we ended up, we were put in the cattle trains. And this was the journey to Auschwitz. We traveled in that Krakow and Auschwitz isn't a far distance at all. But we were traveling maybe for two days without water. And it was, I don't know how many people were in this cattle train in one of those compartments, but maybe one couldn't move and one couldn't sit down either. So you could imagine.

When we arrived in Auschwitz, I have later some pictures that maybe I can show to you. It was a big sign, work makes you free in German. And so, of course, a little bit of hope crept into my heart. I will work diligently, and maybe I'll make it.

The minute we came out from those cattle trains, there were all those dogs, and barking, and the machine guns. It looks totally like hell, but completely. And for a minute, I really thought, am I still alive? I was pinching myself. Am I alive, or am I in hell? What is it really?

Of course, they marched us through the gates. And the first encounter, we went into a big washroom. And this is a picture, maybe later, I will pass it around. It's me, all the three of me.

They shaved us. I said us, because in Auschwitz, you never talk about me. It was always us, because this was the life support. And this is the way we lived together. So this is what it started. They shaved us. They tattooed us. And this is the number which I have. Here it is on my hand, 32127.

But getting the tattoo, it isn't a physical pain. It's the feeling that you're not a person anymore. You're not a human being anymore. You don't know who you are anymore. You're referred as to a number. You lose your self esteem, and you don't start, and you don't consider yourself anymore worthwhile to be a human being. And this was the whole purpose of the Germans to make you feel totally completely worthless, and give up trying, give up any thought of surviving.

We were put into a block, where maybe 2,000 people were. And the size of the block maybe was like two times the size of this room. Both sides in the block we're sleeping on boards. And those boards were divided to three levels-- one, and the middle, and on the upper. And each compartment on those boards were 10 people. If one moved, everybody else had to move. No cover, nothing.

You would think they would give you some straw or something. This is the way we slept during the winter, and during the summer, and all over. And in the beginning, even in the first weeks, I witnessed already first of all they wake us at 4:30. There was a siren. And you had to get up very quickly and get up. If not, you encountered a severe beating. 5 o'clock was the appell, which means counting. And they were counting us endlessly, endlessly. They wanted the number to agree, whatever.

I don't remember how many prisoners at this time. But let's pretend that some people died during the night, and they couldn't be standing. And nobody had the count of the dead people. We would be standing as long as the bookkeeping would agree and they were satisfied that all those people are counted-- the dead, and the sick, and the wounded, and whoever else.

Sometimes we were standing three hours or four hours, no socks, wooden shoes, bare. Which reminded me. This is a head covering which I was carrying all the time. And later, when we were liberated, I thought I'll keep it. Maybe people want to see it. And they will believe it.

As a matter of fact, to remind you, this is what we wore. This is for the head, and something looses, looking like a dress. This was the whole dress for winter, 30 degrees or maybe less.

We're freezing, and people I was very young then and very healthy. But people which were maybe suffering from any ailment just were falling down really like flies. After a while, I was sick too, typhoid. And there were no hospitals there.

So they took me into another barrack. And of course, there Mengele was ruling, the physician. Maybe you heard about him, the angel of death.

I really was unconscious maybe for two weeks, at very high fever. And as you know, no medication was given to anybody, except a little bit of water. And I couldn't eat either. I was sleeping with another girl in the same bunk. Then it was like two boards. I was this side and she was that side. I was unconscious. And after I waked up, she wasn't anymore. I found out she was dead. I had another bed mate, another girl was there.

During that time, there were so many selections. But since my number didn't have a triangle with a Jewish, star, a Jewish star, I was spared. Otherwise, when I was unconscious, I would have been taken to the crematorium where I was sleeping and I was unconscious.

After I was released from there, I came back to the block where I was initially. I made some friends on this block, and they saw that I couldn't walk. My legs were swollen. And I could hardly move. And they knew if this is going to persist, I will end up in the block which is called 25, which was one before the crematorium. This is where they start after every selection, there was one SS man, [NON-ENGLISH], and this was the direction where he was conducting people who going to live, and who's going to die, who shall live and who shall die. And this was the direction, one way or the other way.

And a friend of mine, she saw what's going to happen to me. And somehow she took me to the kitchen to peel potatoes, and probably this is the reason that I survived. I was eating those peels from the potatoes, and with another woman which was sitting next to me, she was a lawyer from Italy, and she spoke English. And at that time I knew some English too. And this was the way we communicated.

And she was the one to tell me really you are still a young child, but you're going to make it. You have to live. You have to. And really, she gave me so much courage and so much help, and this was the only way to make it and to survive, to lean next to another person, to another human being, and not to feel so completely abandoned by the whole world, by everybody.

What we believe then is that no one knows in the free world what's happening to us. Because if they would only know, they would come here and bomb the camp. After all, we didn't care if we would live, if we would continue. It's only to finish this agony.

But unfortunately, no place ever came, and nothing of the sort happened. We witnessed many times of big acts of heroism and friendship in the camp. We had a young girl, and she was called a messenger, a messenger in the camp. She was circulating between one block and the other. And she was usually going to the main office to announce how many people, how many prisoners were in the camp.

And one day, she escaped. She had a Polish friend. They were in love. He was a carpenter so-called, he was. And his people took all kind of professions which weren't in real life, but just to survive, and to be able to go on. So this person, he was a carpenter, which really he wasn't.

And I think the underground helped them. And somehow they escaped. And we all hoped for their escape, they're going to tell what's happening. People will know. Maybe England will hear, maybe United States, maybe somebody will come to our rescue, somebody. After maybe a month, they were caught and brought back to camp. And all our hopes really went to nothing.

We had to witness the execution. She was hanged. We were standing probably a whole day, because they were giving us a lecture. This has to happen if you are going to listen, if you're going to work, you will survive. You will have everything. But if you are going to act that way, like she, this is the way you are going to end up.

As we were standing, this was summer when she was really hanged, and it was a terrible thing. We thought we will not go on after that. When we were standing the next day, it was the summer of '44. We were standing in the appells and we counted, and you couldn't breathe because it was hot, and you could feel the sweet taste of blood. People were being

gassed. And the smoke was all over, and over, and over. And people were crying.

And they were saying, who is in the smoke? Is it my mother? Is it my sister? Is it my brother? You could feel this smell and the taste, sweet. It was something unbearable. It was summertime. You could never see a bird in Auschwitz flying by. It was quite a big camp. But you never encountered a bird, a blade of grass, or nothing like this. It was all death and destruction.

The camp was surrounded by barbed wire. And many times one had to hold on a friend standing next to me, because she just wanted to do one thing, run to the wires and touch them, and end it. But only this closeness that we felt that this is our supportive system saved one from that. The friendship, the closeness, and the cares under those conditions. So you can see that the human nature is really strong to develop all those feelings of compassion and friendship under those circumstances.

We were constantly hungry. If they gave us a slice of bread and something that looked like coffee but it wasn't. It was supposed to last the whole day, till we started, until we came back from work around 6 o'clock, and then it was a soup. And we were standing in the lines for soup, long, long hours. And we prayed. If they give you from the bottom, it's going to be a little bit heavier. Maybe your hunger will be satisfied. Maybe you had something to eat finally, and those endless dreams. What will you eat if you survived?

And people, let's say which were a little bit older and knew something about cooking, they were dreaming up a menu what would you eat if you could. Something that you could not imagine, like you would say, no. Not the moon, because we were already at the moon. But something totally let's say get in touch with outer space people, something that you really don't believe. And we were dreaming about the menu.

Sometime in the evening if somebody remembered a poem and you listened to the poem, it gave you a lift. You could go to sleep hungry, another day it may be a song. And those kind of things kept you out going.

In 1944, maybe two months later that I mentioned about the hanging, people started coming from Warsaw, from the Warsaw ghetto. It was an uprising. And after that uprising, most of the ghetto was burned. It was burning, no one was surviving. But then part of Warsaw was also destroyed. And they were deporting people from Warsaw.

When they came, they told us what happened to the ghetto. They told us what happened to them. It was already quite late, maybe September in 1944. It was already very bad. The main Auschwitz camp, Birkenau, where all the crematoriums were, we were moved from there. I also wanted to mention at that time there were an uprising in the crematoria. The people that were working by the oven, they were working for a duration maybe for six months. And after that, usually they were gassed because they knew too much, and they didn't want them to go and maybe they would be sharing those with other people.

So at the end of '44, there was an uprising. This was called the Sonderkommando, the special people that were working in the crematoria. I can't remember if there were any survivors from that time. However, I can remember Mengele very well. I can remember him. It's already 45 years. But I seem like I saw him yesterday. And regardless of what people say that he is dead, I still don't believe that he is dead.

I can see every time we were standing in the morning, and they were counting. And he was coming over to the rows of people, and just pointing out to them. They were taking them to a special block, 25. And that block they were kept for days. There's no food. There's no water, nothing. Sometimes I can hear screams. Always sometime I wake up in the middle of the night and the only word that I hear is water, wasser.

Because when I was passing this, this is the only thing that you heard. You could never go close to look inside. They kept those people till they had an amount of people that the furnace could take. They didn't want to waste any Zyklon.

At the beginning of '45, we were evacuated. We didn't know where to, because it was called the death march. It was January. We were walking. In Poland and it was so cold, freezing. We were walking in the wooden shoes all day. And in the evening we just lay down, sometime in a barn, sometime on the snow. The next day, I don't know how many

people were frozen. But more people were shot, because when they wanted to stop just for one minute to rest, they were shot.

And the snow was just marked by the blood stains. It was if you can imagine what was [NON-ENGLISH], this is what it was. One step in blood and the second, it was more blood, and shooting, and more. We were marching maybe six days. Finally, we came to the border, German and Polish border. And we were boarded on the trains, cattle trains.

We traveled another week till we arrived in Ravensbruck. It was another concentration camp. They really didn't have any place where to put us. We stayed there 10 days under a tent, I don't know, maybe 10,000 people or more. They didn't have food for us, nothing was organized. And it was agony. We're eating bark, or whatever blade we could pick up of grass.

After a while, they divided us into groups. And I was assigned to work in an ammunition factory painting wings of planes. And I was painting those wings daily. Of course, I was so hungry that it was just impossible to work and keep going on. I had a friend. And this friend of mine, she lives in Buffalo. And because of her, I think I live in Buffalo too. She's like my sister, and she's all my family that I really had. I'm not talking about my husband and children.

And she was working then in the kitchen. And then she brought me some soup one day. And she said, don't worry. I'll come the next day too. And I think she saved my life. Not I think, I know. She saved my life.

It was May of '45, May '45, May the 2nd, or May the 3rd. The Germans came into the block, and they said no one is allowed to leave. The shutters were closed and the windows, and nobody is allowed to go next to the door or the windows. We stayed a whole day inside and a whole night. And the next day in the morning, the Allies came and they liberated us. It was May the 3rd.

They opened the doors. They opened the windows. They came in. They said, you are free. Of course, we didn't believe them. They repeated it I don't know how many times. And finally, they started giving out chocolate, and packages, and sardines, and whatever. And people were like marching corpses. They started to eat the sardines. A lot of them paid for that with their life. They couldn't take it.

After a few days, we were talking to them. What are our chances? Where could we go? What should we do? And mainly, we wanted to go back to Poland, to find out what was happening to our families. By the end of May, it was not-- I just want to mention something to you.

Look, all the while, we said, if we ever make it and we'll survive, every German that is going to be next to us on the proximity that we can reach, we are going to kill, each one of them. We spent there in this little city, near Neustadt-Glewe probably three weeks till the end of May. And many times, we went into the city because the camp was maybe three miles away. So how would the people know there was a camp?

But, OK. They pretended they didn't know. We went into the city. A lot of apartments or homes were desolated. Nobody was there. But occasionally, we saw a German. If we could really touch them, but none of us could really try it. We couldn't, to beat them, or to hit them, or something.

We reproached each other later, saying what kind of people are we? At least do something to them. But we couldn't. And many years after that, I couldn't live with myself, not doing nothing to a German person. But maybe 30 years later, I realized that maybe they killed our parents, and my brothers, and sisters. But one thing they didn't take away from us is humanity. And as so, that maybe they never heard and they never knew it can exist.

Going back to the day of liberation, we're liberated. And we couldn't believe. As I said, go a little farther you will see therefore the trees are burnt. Just go see something. The first thing what I did is I embraced a tree, and kissed it from top to bottom, and just throw myself on the grass kissing it, and crying. And I just didn't believe this freedom looking up the sky, not seeing the smoke, and not feeling the smell of blood. It was something totally, totally unbelievable. It was, I just cannot even tell you. It was like being in a daze.

It wasn't really reality. It was totally a daze. Then finally we realized that nobody's going to drag us back to the camp that we aren't prisoners. That we are free. We wanted to go back to Poland. And this was in May '45. There were no trains really. We couldn't. So finally a number of people that survived, we took a buggy and a horse. And we traveled through part of Germany to the Polish border. It was very, very bad to travel at those times because the Russian army was also there. And it was very dangerous for us.

So what we did, we traveled at night. And we slept days. It wasn't easy, till we came to Poland. And of course, the first thing was I went to my home. Other people were living there. There wasn't a trace of anybody. I started to look for people. My brother, I knew that he was hiding with his wife. I heard that he wasn't alive either. I couldn't find anybody and anyone anymore in that city.

After a while, I left. And I went back to Krakow. This is a place where I really went to school. And before the war, as I mentioned to you, I was a junior high student. So I went back to Krakow. And I was looking around for friends and for people, but I couldn't find anybody. All my family was gone, and I lost everybody. I was just left alone. And many times when I speak to students, and I want them to make aware, I want them to feel, have a little bit feeling of what I was feeling when I found that I don't have anyone-- no parents, no sister, no brothers, no uncle, no one.

So I tell them sometimes, take a piece of paper and draw a tree. And put on your family the leaves for your parents, for your sister, for your grandparents, and for yourself too. And as I talk to you, just erase the leaves or cross them out. And see who's left. Only you. Try to imagine how you would be feeling, what would you do with your life? Would you be bitter? Would you go on drugs? Would you drink? Would you like to make something of yourself? What would you do?

And it's not easy to dwell on this subject, because I cannot sit down and write down my thoughts, because every word is like a knife cutting my flesh. It's just only when I have to do it, I just recollect some thoughts, and I talk to you. But you can never get rid of that, what happened. Because at times, I have nightmares. And at times, I think I'm perfectly all right and nothing is happening. But I hear a siren passing. And everything comes back, because usually the German raids started with a siren.

Or it could be complete stillness and this would be, again, a time to remember, when you were scared waiting for them. They're coming up, and they will drag you out from the house. They take your parents. Or a [INAUDIBLE], or a scream, all those things always are with you. And always remember. And always make you to remember as much as I want to forget.

Can you talk about how you got an a non-Jewish identity?

OK. As I mentioned to you that I was going back home at that day. And they told me, don't go home. The whole city is deported. And I met two young people, and they knew my parents. And they said, we sent out to save somebody. And we'll save you. So after a while, well while I was hiding in this heap of hay, they made some papers for me, forged papers. And with these papers, I made later on, when I was arrested, I tore up those papers, because I was afraid. I think the Gestapo, they would force me to tell them who gave me those papers.

So I ended up at the Gestapo without any ID, without any documents really, because I couldn't show what I had.

Perhaps could you explain how you eventually wound up in America, I mean, after the war?

I married in Poland after the war. It means I went back directly to school, '47 I went back to school. I had to go back to high school. And it was very hard to start after so many years of suffering and thinking only how to find a crumb of bread or something to sustain you, go back to school and think about logarithms and others, and algebra, or physics, or chemistry. It was unusually really very, very hard.

But I went back. And I got my high school diploma. And later, I went back to the university. In the meantime, I married, and I had two children, my son and my daughter. And we tried very hard to leave Poland. However, you couldn't get a passport. Behind the Iron Curtain to get a passport that's something unbelievable. You can't. So we were trying every time, every few months, go to Warsaw and try to obtain a new one. And I was telling them I'm no danger. I'm in no

danger of revealing any secrets, because I don't work for the government, I'm only a student. And I don't have any position. I don't belong to the party. But it didn't help.

It's only when Stalin died, and Khrushchev came to power, and there was a political fall that finally, I got my passport and my family too. And then we left.

When you went to high school, were there other survivors among the students or were they at totally different stages?

Oh, no they were only young children, very young children, like high school children. And I was six or seven years older than them. But it didn't make any difference to me. There weren't any survivors there. And later, when I went to the university, I was probably the oldest student too. But I didn't feel any older. It doesn't make-- no, it didn't really bother me.

You said before that you were working before you went to paint the airplane wings. What kind of work were you doing?

I was peeling potatoes in the kitchen. Between the kitchen was a room for itself, and before the kitchen you peel potatoes, carrots, or whatever else. And it was quite-- it wasn't bad to be there. But I thought Auschwitz was a worse place already to be. But when we came to Neustadt-Glewe in Germany, it was even worse.

In this place there weren't anymore crematoriums. But there wasn't even the slice of bread, and not even the watery soup that you get in the evening. It was totally no food at all. It was only the salt that you could have is only something to eat, and eat, and eat. You can imagine getting the slice of bread, and eating a crumb, and another crumb. But finally couldn't help it. And you ended up, the whole thing. You thought you will save your crumbs for later. But nobody had this willpower to do.