

Change film, camera four is up, sync take seven.

Oh, I'm sorry, can you start again. OK.

The camp we came to was a small town called Bolkenhain. I remember we were marched from the railroad station. People looked very curiously at us. We came to an enclosure adjacent to a factory, which had a couple of barrack. And it was a tremendous click as the gates closed, sort of a finality.

And there stood a woman, clad all in black. And she was literally barking. I've never heard a human voice being that harsh. She looked like a bulldog. And I said, this is going to be absolutely the worst. We were supposed to refer to her as Frau Kligler.

She turned out to be the hope, the inspiration, and the knowledge that perhaps not all Germans were cruel. She was a decent, wonderful, warm, caring human being. No doubt she was picked for her position because of her looks. But the looks completely belied what was underneath it all. She was decent. She was good.

We stayed in that camp for a little over a year. No one was sent to Auschwitz. I don't know if she particularly loved us, but she pinned a lie to the lips of all those who said they had no choice. I personally am indebted to her for my own life at one point when this infamous Lindner was known for his cruelty, swooped down for an inspection of the camp. And I had been very ill at a time. I was running a very high fever. And I was permitted to stay in my bunk.

And she came in there were two-- no, there were three of us who were ill-- and she came and she said, girls, get yourself together. I remember I couldn't put my-- I had my skiing boots. My father made me wear my skiing boots when I left home-- skiing boots in June. And I blessed him for it, because I wore those boots for three years-- in every season.

I remember she stooped down to tie my boots, and she literally dragged me and the two other girls to the factory. She had worked in the factory before. And she set my looms in motion. And she said, pull yourself together, this is life or death today.

And before we left Germany, there was a few of us who survived or left the position-- said if Frau Kligler should be found-- she might have been arrested for being the head of a camp where actually she was the person who had saved many lives. And she was sort of a bright light in this darkness.

There was spiritual resistance when you were in that camp. And she sort of must have looked the other way. Can you tell me?

Oh, sure. You know, I mean, look she demanded certain things. I mean, I don't want to give you the impression that she was-- we worked very hard. We were taught to weave. And the work was very difficult. And you had to be very swift in that because the material which we were weaving, you know, was very poor. The threads would break. And everything was interpreted as a sabotage if you didn't work it. Like skilled weavers would have two looms. We had four looms to watch.

I mean it was hard, backbreaking labor. But we still had some food. I mean, you would consider it dreadful under normal circumstances. But of what was to follow later, I think of that transition period, from home and from love and from a normality to the horror which followed. I think that she made it bearable, you know. She did not steal any of our food. We got to food. If somebody was ill, as I mentioned I was at that particular time, she let you stay in the bunk, you know.

She really tried. She was a human being. And I think was terribly important to meet a human being under those circumstances. To a lot of people I believe that a concentration camp seems like a snake pit where people stepped on each other for survival and stole from each other. That wasn't the case at all.

And again, I speak only about the camps in which I was. And I can say that I have seen the finest qualities of humanity

there-- the sharing and caring. And whatever one had was shared with somebody else-- be it a crumb of bread or if somebody had a birthday, you know. And on Sunday we sometimes got margarine on our bread, so we would scrape the margarine off on Sunday from several of the pieces to save it for the person who had a birthday-- on their birthday they put some margarine on the bread, and things like that.

My closest friend, Ilse, of my speak so often, once found the raspberry in the gutter. And she carried it in her pocket all day long-- through a hot day-- a raspberry-- her total possession. And that night she had reached out through the barbed wire and got a leaf and washed it. And she presented me the raspberry on a leaf. It was her total possession. I mean, people did some wonderful things there. And those are the things that I want to remember.

And we had very little time, of course, you know, and most of them with we were very tired-- whatever free time we had. But that was used if somebody remembered of seeing a particular film or ballet or something which was shared and, you know, and acted out. And there was an enormous support system there. And that really was the other side to survive. That on one hand, we experienced extreme cruelty, and on the other hand, incredible love and friendship. And there was a balance there. And there was hope there.

And somehow you thought of them-- the Nazis-- like I would fantasize that they looked like a snake or like this and that. I mean you didn't think of them as human. But you could identify the others as a human being. I always thought of them as below my contempt, you know. And this is how you could somehow take it.

Sometimes, of course, you fell under the spell of it, you know-- when they would march you out, and tell you that you will be here all your life, and this and that. And I always said, you know, you can't fall under that. You have to imagine how they were look dead and things like that. And I was spinning fantasies, and that helped. Again, you know, you have to be very young at that time or have a very vivid imagination, which fortunately I had. So you know, I could sort of often lift myself out of that and imagine different things. And almost anything could conjure this type of picture sometimes.

I remember working on the looms, and we had overhead lights. And the way sometimes the light fell on the loom, I could remember that light coming through to my window in the morning when I was a child waking up. And then I could build a whole picture around that and block out everything that was around me. And live sort of in a world-- you know, you could live on two levels. There's no problem about that. And I guess even now, I do live on two levels, you know. Sometimes the other one comes up and makes it a little more difficult when that intrudes, but most of the time you can keep it down.

Is this where the play was?

Oh, yeah.

Tell me about that.

Well, one Christmas-- again it was under Frau Kligler-- during Frau Kligler time-- I think Christmas and Hanukkah sort of fell together. And so we had to clean the factory space. We were allowed a hot shower after that was over. And that was the best shower I ever remember. It was hot because we didn't have hot showers. We were permitted to shower once a week, cold shower. But this was a hot shower-- sort of a special deal.

And we were going to put on a play because everybody else was busy. And Frau Kligler we did not worry so terribly much about. Because we did throw some things in Polish, and of course, she didn't understand Polish. So that was OK. My friend Ilse and I staged a play. And of course, I participated in it as well. Some people had wonderful singing voices and dance, so we were going to have a performance.

And this particular play dealt with two grandmothers-- Ilse and I were two grandmothers in that play. We gathered some stuff from under the looms and put it in our hair to make it gray. And we had found little pieces of wire and made such a granny glasses. And I wrote the play in the washroom at night. And the next day we performed it. We were sitting-- we made a clearing between the bunks. There was a clearing that we could push the tables aside.

And we were talking about the war, the past of course, you know predicting great futures for everyone. And I still remember the words of the play. One of my friends, who as a matter of fact lives in Los Angeles, reminded me of that particular thing. And then we had our two granddaughters come up and they listen to us for a while-- sort of this bored look. And they said, come on, let's talk about our boyfriends. You know how old people exaggerate.

And so we were 17 and 18, respectively, at that particular time. We somehow seem to have hit upon the very core of our existence-- that someday we will live in a place where Jewish grandmothers will be allowed to live and Jewish grandchildren will live. But best of all to live in a place where the climate will be such that our children and grandchildren will not believe our tales of the past.

The person who played my granddaughter in the play is alive. She's in Israel. She's the mother of one of Israel's most decorated heroes. Tragically the person who played Ilse's granddaughter is not alive. Just as Ilse is not alive. And these are the faces that I remember looking at. We performed it--

During the time when we did the play, we also fashioned a menorah out of our evening meal of potatoes. We cut it very carefully. And we had sort of a dilemma, should we try to find-- of course, we had no candles. But then we thought even if we had candles that it would be more symbolic to sort of light the flame of hope within us without seeing it. That would be the unseen things.

And we sang a song about Hanukkah. But we reworked it to a modern, then, version of this new hopeful menorah and of the defiance of the Maccabees. And the little bit of oil which lasted for seven days when it was supposed to last only one night. So you know, we applied it to us. And we felt very, very strongly about it.

We also did some other things like Yom Kippur when we were admonished-- had to fast and had to deliver the prescribed quota of material. Everyone fasted even though we knew the dire consequences if you did not do it, which was difficult even under most normal circumstances. And we were given noodles and sugar at some point. Nobody ate it.

And there was a feeling of almost holiness and tranquility. It was a very important victory within you. Yes, you can do it. And it was a victory over the Nazis. We could do it within ourselves. And we did a number of things like that.

I remember when they were particularly vicious-- not Frau Kligler, but the ones that were coming in to give us a pep talk. There was particularly one, Meister Zimmer, whom I absolutely detested. And he was totally bald. He was very intelligent and spoke marvelously well. I mean he had almost an hypnotic voice. And he would say that if we stayed our lives we will learn decency and things.

And he just drove me crazy was his type of thing, because decency was the thing that I felt my parents live by. And to hear it by him it became an ugly thing. And I remember as soon as I was starting to fall under his spell, I imagined his ears were sort of put through a [INAUDIBLE]. And I imagine how he would look dead and how worms would come out of his ears. And I remember once I must have smiled to myself because he said to me, what are you smiling about. I don't know. I was smiling.

So you could take certain things and turn it around, and feel that, in your mind, you had a certain victory over the things that they were saying. And I thought to myself, sure, he will die long before I will. And I will do such and such. And it was probably very childish, but I think it worked. It sometimes could work very, very well. You could lift yourself above what was there.

I remember in one of my-- which followed very much later-- that I was busy on the death march. You don't want the death march now?

Not yet. Let's go--

Then I should leave that one out, because that--

No, we're going to do the death march. But we'll do it later.

No, because I have this one particular thing that-- should I do it later? Sorry, you will probably cut it.

Do it now.

OK. We didn't get anything to eat for days, literally. We were bitter cold and hungry and everything. And I was planning a party after the war. And I had a dilemma, for almost an entire day I should have a blue velvet dress or a red velvet dress. I couldn't resolve it. I really liked the color blue much better as a color. But I knew that red looked better on me.

But you could occupy your mind and hang your thoughts on trivia of that nature. And it became very important. And this is how you passed the hours and forgot the hunger and the cold. And I do believe that if you were blessed with imagination, that you could work that. If unfortunately you were a person that faced reality, I think you didn't have much of a chance. I felt I was lucky because I never faced reality. I still don't.

But when we had to leave Bolkenhain, which was very hard, we left for another camp because we did not have enough raw material to do any weaving. Bolkenhain had a sort of a sister factory called-- there were several. One was Landeshut. One was Merzdorf. And we were sent to Merzdorf.

And Merzdorf was horrible camp by comparison with Bolkenhain. First of all, we were housed in a building maybe under the sixth or seventh or eighth floor, way up. And it was horribly hot there during the summer. And of course, the windows were nailed down. I mean, we were literally broiling. And the people in charge there were in complete contrast to what we know Frau Kligler.

There was a lagerführer in there who was perhaps 18 or 19 years old-- the most vulgar looking thing. She was wearing rings on every finger. And then sometimes two or three rings on each finger. And she had short stubby red hands. And her enjoyment was to-- she had a little cart like children ride around. And she would sit in that cart with a little whip. And we had to pull her. That was her joy. I mean the mentality of that person was not to be believed.

And then there was another person there who was in charge of us. And she had been a guard in one of the female jails. And we sometimes had-- the work that we did, people who committed some sort of misdemeanor or what have you in jail came to spend a day working with us. And that was our normal work.

We worked at different jobs there. One of the jobs, which was dreadful-- there were several that were bad-- one was to hand bricks one to another. And you have to throw the brick and catch it quickly. If you didn't, it landed on your hands and it crushed your fingers. The other job was to go in a nearby swamp because they were growing linen there. And in the swamp you had to put the little-- the not finished linen, they sink and grown, into the swamp too. Because then it opened-- the enclosure in which to threads the linen was, I don't know if I'm explaining it right. It was backbreaking labor. You had to stand in the swamp doing that, and it was swarming with mosquitoes.

And the other thing that we did is load into a silo, an enormous silo-- I don't know how many stories high-- a man with a crane was throwing down bundles. And we were standing on-- the bundles came crashing down, and you had to arrange them. And you could easily be swallowed up in that. First of all, you were swaying all the time. And then they came so fast that if you didn't catch it fast enough, it hit you and pricked your skin. And then your skin was bleeding. And then you were in the swamp, and the mosquitoes waiting.

It was a horrible time. And it was there in that silo where some of the women came from jails, who had committed murder or God knows what, as punishment for a day. And they said they preferred solitary any time then to work there. It was there, as a matter of fact, where I really felt I was going to give up. There was one overseer who was particularly cruel to me. And he had singled me out for this type of punishment.

So during the day I was working at flax or handling the bundles. At night we had to shovel coal. Wagons, you know,

came. We had to shovel it because the tracks had to be cleared. And it was going on day and night. There were lots of soldier trains going by. We didn't know if there were trains with German soldiers going back. And people said there were trains of people to be sent to Auschwitz.

And I remember my resistance really weakening. And I said to myself once after the coal car was empty, and I was standing with that shovel in my hand, and I said it would be so easy now to jump in the oncoming train. And it will be over in a couple of seconds and become a part of that stillness not to have to face tomorrow. What's going to be tomorrow? It's going to be flax in the morning and bundles at night and into a swamp again and to hunger. And I just felt I had enough. And I resisted that.

And then another day came by, and the next night-- and I remember I had promised my father. That was one thing I was never going to do, was to really give up. And it sort of a-- but I came very close to doing it. And I remember that one night when I definitely said-- it was a beautiful moonlit night-- and I said to myself, it's time to do it. And I heard very faint oncoming of a train-- from very far away probably.

Suddenly I felt a pain in my both sides of my neck-- very sharp. And it was right in the beginning of the war when we had not heard from my brother. My mother was sick. And we were told that we had to leave with 20 pounds of our belongings-- our home. I remember standing there. And we heard of a family who committed suicide together. And I sort of half wished that my parents had suggested that. I was always very close to my father.

I remember I stood there and was thinking about that. My father must have guessed my thoughts because he came up to me. He stood behind me and he said, what you are thinking is cowardly and it's wrong. And he said, promise me that you're never going to do it. I didn't answer him. And he--

Second sticks.

OK.

OK. Very early in the war while we were still at home-- as a matter of fact, we were still living in our own quarters. It was shortly after my brother was taken away. And my mother was really gone to pieces. She was quite ill. And my father had a reoccurring thing with his heart. And we got orders to leave our home with 20 pounds of our belongings. And my father told me to sort of pack suitcases. I had no idea how to do that. And we had heard of a family who committed suicide together. And I really thought at that point that it would be good to do that. I had hoped my parents would suggest it.

And I remember standing at a window and thinking about. And my father came up behind me, and he always knew what I was thinking. And he said to me, what you are thinking is wrong. It's cowardly. It's terrible. He said, you promise me never to do that, no matter what. And I didn't answer him. And then he sort of took me, he took my head like that. And he turned it toward him, and he looked at me, and he said, I want your promise now. And I said, papa, I promise.

And during those last days in Merzdorf that promise became pretty faint. I was exhausted. You know, I don't know anymore how many days and nights I was working in that heat and in the swamp and the coal. And ever thing swam together. I really wanted to end it. And at that precise moment when I had really almost decided-- I mean, I don't know if I would have carried it through or not. But I have a feeling that I was pretty much at the end of my rope. And I knew that the train was going to come. And I figured, oh, I'm going to jump. Suddenly I felt a very sharp pain in my neck. And the promise came back. And obviously I didn't.

The strangest thing is that the following day everything changed. The following day as we were working in the swamp, that Aufsicht-- that fury came running and had a list in her hand. And asked the people who had the following numbers to come forward. And I think my mind must have been so muddled I wasn't even thinking.

And Ilse's number was called. She was working with me. Ilse was not working nights. That was sort of directed more against me or a few other people. And he called Ilse's number, and nobody raised their hands. And she says, well who had that number? And Ilse took my hand, and she said, she did. I wasn't even aware of what she was doing. She

obviously was substituting her number for mine. She wanted to save me from something.

And I was led away. And Ilse jumped out of the swamp, and she also started running. And as we came to the courtyard of the camp, there stood the director of the factory of Bolkenhain. And Ilse literally threw herself at his feet. And she said, I want to go with my sister. So he said, what is your number? And she gave her correct number and mine. So he said, well you both are on the list. So he said, you run, wash up. You both look like pigs.

And actually what was happening is they needed more people for weaving. And he came to collect from this particular camp, which was not a weaving factory, to an adjacent one called Landeshut, which was also under the auspices of Bolkenhain.

Again we were loaded on a truck. And I couldn't wait for the gates to open-- to get out. And I didn't know how to thank Ilse for it. But I remember that night I just said to her, I'm glad I didn't jump. And she says, what did you say? I said, I'll tell you someday. I never told her.

Why did that lagerfÃ¼hrer have it in for you?

I can only surmise. I was cleaning some small component in the camp, and he came up. He wasn't a lagerfÃ¼hrer. He was sort of a supervisor there. And he said to me, how would you like some hot soup or some bread? You know, which was sort of-- I said to myself, why is he saying that to me. If he wanted to help me why doesn't he give me a piece of bread, you know?

So I sort of said, well, I eat in camp, which I felt was stating the truth without accusing them that they're not giving us enough to eat, but not saying anything. And so I gathered that he had maybe certain designs on me or maybe just wanting to test me. I don't know. That incidentally, in our camp, was not much of a problem.

There were very few men around-- working in the camps were mostly old. And there were a lot of young pretty German girls there, so that was not a problem. I don't know. In any event, I think just the type of defiance that I showed, he decided to sort of break my spirit-- maybe out of sport or just to show his things. And this is why I was picked for every type of hard work.

But I think it's a terribly important lesson. One should never, ever, ever give up. No matter how difficult the thing is, giving up is a final solution to a temporary problem. Our problem wasn't so temporary. Nevertheless, it did pass. But one was keenly aware of the preciousness of life and to hold onto it for as long as possible. And to me this was really the most important thing. And I would say that during the entire time that I was in the camp-- I mean except for the beginning of the war, when I really did not know and only heard that the family had chosen-- they pass together-- this was the only incident that I remember through all the years that I really came close to calling it quits.

That's why I love to say to young people never, ever, ever give up. The darker the night, the brighter the dawn. And it sure was bright. And it sure was dark.

I want to jump back into your 18th birthday-- what your mother did.

My 18th birthday was literally a few weeks-- my birthday's May 8th-- and on the 28th and 28th of January-- on the 29th I was separated from my mother on the 28th. It's my father that was about five weeks before. So that was my last birthday. And my mother decided to have a party. She invited the number of my friends. And she somehow had gotten some oatmeal and baked some cookies, which we all swore tasted marvelously well, like almonds.

And my parents gave me an incredible present. They gave me an orange. I've always loved oranges. And of course, to obtain an orange in the ghetto was almost impossible. I later learned that my mother had given a very treasured and very valuable ring for that orange. And that was the last present I got from my parents.

Tell me about your brother and the stone. My brother was almost 4 1/2 years older than I. And he was really my hero. My brother was very good looking. My mother was a very beautiful woman. People used to say, it's a shame. She is

such a beautiful mother, and she looks like her father. But the boy looks so much like the mother. So you know, I always sort of grew up in the shadow of my brother who was extremely good looking and very accomplished. And everything he touched, he seemed to be able to do well.

And we fought at times, but by and large, he was a wonderful brother. He always protected me. And of course, he had his friends coming to the house, so they were boys around. And I started to get interested in boys. And a lot of my friends were seeking my friendship because of my brother.

And the first day when the Nazis came in, they rounded up people they would find and put them in the temple, and set the temple on fire. That was really the first deed, the first horror which was inflicted upon the citizens of the town. And it was shortly before my brother was taken away, when he had to go to register at what was like the community center, which was not too far from the temple. The temple had been destroyed of course.

And I went with my brother. I don't remember if it was now on the way to where he had to register or on the way back. I think it was on the way back. We passed by the temple, and we climbed over the debris. And we were sitting there talking. He talked to me very seriously, you know. Usually he talked down to me a bit. But it was more like an equal. And it was one pillar of the temple-- it stood amid all the destruction. And he said to me, look at that one. He said, it survived, and we are going to survive. They can't do it to us.

And then he picked up a couple of little stones which were charred. And he put one in his pocket, and he gave me one. And he said, I want you to carry it with you all the time to remind you of this-- the temple and of our conversation. And I carried it with me. But later on the death march I must have lost it someplace. I carried it in a little sack-- it's own little sack. I carried it on my neck on a string. I lost it.

We're about to run out. We're about to run out.