

Here with Cecilie-- I think she pronounces it "Ce-cile--" Klein-Pollack.

[BEEP]

I want to start with your describing the deportation from the ghetto, and I want you to include the context, the time, the place, who was with you, and what happened.

I was in Hust. The name of the ghetto was Hust. This was a town in Czechoslovakia which was occupied at that time by the Hungarians because it was annexed by the Hungarians. And my mother was with me in the ghetto, my sister, her little boy Donny, and her husband.

They came, the Hungarian police. First of all, we were always brutalized because they would just come in and take out some girls and make them do all kinds of stupid things, or men. They would tell the men to walk on all fours and be like horses, and they would ride on them in order to brutalize them.

But then came the time when they just chased everybody out. They told us the day before that we can pack one small suitcase and we should be ready to leave the ghetto. When we came to the-- it was at one time a factory for bricks. And there they started to search us again. The SS was there also.

And every woman and every girl had to undress naked and we were searched internally for valuables. My mother was a very religious person, and all I could think of was how terrible this is for my mother to go through something-- such a terrible ordeal.

When we were finished, my mother took the baby from my sister because she was holding the little boy Donny, and she had a bottle of milk for the child. And the SS grabbed the bottle of milk and said, let's see, you cow, what you have there. And my mother pleaded, please, the child needs the milk. Please don't take the milk from my grandson.

He started to beat her with a horsewhip. And when I saw that she was being beaten so I screamed so at least I got away the attention from my mother. So my mother ran into the-- because the trains were right there. We were just, you know, going into those cattle trains. So I took away the attention from my mother and he started to beat me with that whip.

And finally I was able to run away also and we were finally in the cattle train. We were pushed in like herrings. At least 75 to 80 people, which would only hold maybe 30. There was no room even-- not to lie down but to sit. Most of the people were standing. And then when we got very tired, we would be sitting down. And they locked us in.

And finally the trains-- before the trains took off, an SS came in and told-- and picked out my brother-in-law that he is going to be the one responsible for-- they gave us two pails for bodily functions and we were traveling 24 hours before they opened those cattle trains. And then my brother-in-law had to take out those pails and they told him to bring in water. In the same pails we received the water.

And he told my brother-in-law that if anybody would escape, then he would be killed. There was no way to escape because there was nowhere to escape. We traveled three days and three nights. Each time they stopped they would take out those pails and bring in water. But the journey was one of the greatest horrors.

First of all, we had no idea where we are being taken. And most of the people were either praying or they were talking about the past and about the future and where we should meet. And my mother wanted to cheer us up so she would tell us that she is sure that wherever we are going we are going to meet-- my other sister was not with us because she was taken before we were separated because we ran away a few years prior, and my sister was therefore taken away with her children to a different ghetto. And we missed her terribly and my mother always hoped that we shall meet my sister.

Then when we arrived to Auschwitz it was like we had just come in to a different world. They opened up those cattle trains. People in striped uniforms came on the train and they started to shout we should get out and leave everything behind and whatever we have is going to be delivered to us.

My brother-in-law still had a watch so he asked one of these men in those striped uniforms, please tell me what's going on here. So they were not allowed to say anything because they were prisoners. They're already here for years. But then my brother-in-law gave him the watch so he told him in Jewish and my mother was standing next to my brother-in-law and I was also standing next to my brother-in-law.

But my sister, as soon as the train opened and the child was crying, so she ran down quickly from the train to get some air. So this man told my brother-in-law, if you have children, then give away the children either to elderly people or people with-- because people with children are going to be killed the same day.

And as soon as my mother heard that, she had presence of mind to run down. And I was next to my mother, and I couldn't really believe that this could possibly be true. But she ran over to my sister, removed the child from her arms and told her, darling, I just found out that women with children will have it very easy. All they will do-- they will take care of the children, but young people will be sent on hard labor and, you know, I'm not so young, I'll never be able to survive hard labor. So she was trying to make my sister believe that by giving her the child she's going to help her.

Before my sister had even a chance to resist or to say no, I don't want to give the child up, my mother had the child in her arm. And as soon as my mother had the child in her arm, there was standing an SS, and his name-- eventually we learned that his name was Mengele. So whoever had children, young people and old people, he separated. So to the left and to the right. So this is how I remained with my sister standing with the other women, young women. And then you want to ask me other questions or shall I continue?

Yeah.

So this is the last-- my mother had only a chance to yell out to me, take care of your sister, because she knew where she was taking her grandson. And although I was the younger, she knew how my sister will suffer when she'll find out what happened to her little son.

And we really didn't have too much time to reflect on anything because everything was done brutally, the shouting. And we were terrified because all we saw there were SS with large dogs and screaming to stand in line, to get into line and the separation of us being conducted with beating. So if somebody didn't move quickly or didn't stay straight or-- so it was-- everything done with brutality and with force so you just did whatever--

Yeah, and where you should begin is-- why don't you begin with the cattle cars arriving and the doors being flung open.

OK. The cattle cars arrived to Auschwitz. At that time we didn't know this was Auschwitz. Some people in striped uniforms came on the train and they started to yell at us we should get out and leave everything behind. Everybody was terribly frightened because we didn't know what's going to happen to us.

My brother-in-law asked this man, please tell me what's going on here because downstairs-- outside we heard a lot of barking and shouting and a lot of commotion. He didn't want to say anything. He was just quiet. But then when my brother-in-law still had a watch and he slipped him the watch, he told him, if you have children, give the children away. And if you have a wife and she has a child, then she is not going to-- she will be killed unless you give the child to somebody else, to older people, because they are going to be killed anyway.

My mother was standing next to my brother along with me and my sister was already downstairs because she was glad to be able to get out of the cattle train so that the child should get some air after this terrible journey. As soon as my mother heard that, she had the presence of mind to run over to my sister, quickly remove the child from her arm and told her, darling, I just found out that women with children will have it easy. All they will do is take care of the children. But young people will go on hard labor. And I'm not so young and I'm not so well. I will never survive so I'll take good care of your child and you take care of your sister.

But as soon as she had the child in her arms and before my sister had even a chance to object because no mother likes to give up her child for whatever reason, she was pushed away between the single people, and my mother was pushed by

Mengele whom we found out that was his name only later because he did the selections, she was pushed to the side where all the women with children and older people were standing.

She had only a chance-- my mother had only a chance to yell out to me, please take care of your sister. My name was [? Cecilie. ?] This is how she called me. And she called out, [? Cilica, ?] take care of your sister because she knew the pain my sister will suffer when she'll find out where she took her grandson.

But we really had no time or a chance to reflect yet on the separation because everything was done with such brutality, with such screaming and yelling. And right away there were the Kapos and block elders who started to beat us into line and the SS with their dogs who were barking and they were trained to tear anybody to pieces if one did not obey the orders.

And so we were finally lined up and they marched us to a huge building which had shower caps, and we were told to undress. And I was always-- I was young and vain and I dressed in my best clothes, my nice coat, my best dress, so I put it nicely together when I undressed.

And there comes over this Kapo and she flings it to the side. And I say, this is my clothes. She said, yes, but you won't need it anymore. And I was terribly scared because I didn't know what that meant. Then when we were undressed we were ordered-- everybody was ordered to stand up on a stool and they shaved us. They shaved our hair and the private parts. And we looked-- we couldn't even recognize each other.

Once we were stripped not only of our clothes but of our hair then we were shoved into those showers. And they first opened the hot water so we were scalded. And as we ran out from under the hot water, we were beaten back by the SS and by the Kapos to go under the showers again. So they opened the ice cold water, which had the same effect.

And finally we were out of this shower. Each of us was given one garment, which, of course, didn't fit. Some got smaller-- that was too small, some got that was too large. We didn't receive not even underwear or brassieres or panties. Just that one dress. It was not a striped dress. It was just a dress that probably the ones before us were killed and they had taken away the clothes.

And finally we were ordered to line up. My sister was calling my name and I was calling her name even though we were standing next to each other. We didn't recognize each other. This is how we looked after we were-- after they finished with us. And then they marched us. We were five in a row. And as we were marching, you could see flames and you could smell-- there was a smell of smoke as you would barbecue something.

And then we asked the ones-- those block elders-- the Kapos who were escorting us, what is this smell? So she said, these are your fathers, your brothers, your sisters, your children. And when my sister heard that, I said, you know, don't listen to her. She's only trying to scare us.

And nobody-- even if when I heard it and even what I heard that this man told my brother-in-law, I really truly didn't believe at that time that this could possibly be true, that anybody could just take and kill completely innocent people that didn't commit any crimes. I thought there must be some mistake.

Then we were led into-- it looked like a big stable and it had three layer bunks. And we were ordered to go into that stable. The number of that stable-- there were 30 stables like those and they pushed in 1,000 girls in one such stable. We were-- to each bunk we were 10.

And we received-- everybody received a blanket. And you could not-- you had to-- when you went to sleep, you could only sleep on your side because if one turned, all of us had to turn because there was no way that one could turn and the other one because there was no room otherwise.

In the morning they woke us up. Tell me when you want me to stop. In the morning they woke us up at 5 o'clock and we had to line up for roll call. And we received some that looked like coffee, but it was just some colored black water. This was our breakfast.

At lunchtime, we got a cup and we all had to keep this cup. This was our most important possession because if you wouldn't have this cup, then you could not receive your portion of the soup that was distributed at lunchtime. But it was so terrible that we still were not used to eat this kind of food so we did not eat it, and then we realized the big mistake that we were making because this meant-- if you didn't-- we got such poor--

[BEEP]

Why don't you start with being given the cup.

OK. The cup that we received became our most prized possession for without it we would starve. Our rations were anyway starvation rations, therefore it was so important to be able to have every meal. And we received lunchtime a cup of soup which was watery and was just swimming a little potato.

And in the evening we would receive a piece of bread and some would receive a piece of margarine and some would receive, let's say, a piece of head cheese. I always tried to change the head cheese for margarine because my sister became completely despondent and depressed over the loss of her child and she refused to eat. So I would force open her mouth because the margarine will dissolve but the head cheese she wouldn't swallow.

And my sister only after a few days even, didn't even last long, she started to talk about suicide. Our camp was surrounded by electrically charged wires, and all she wanted was to go to those wires and kill herself. I wanted very much to live, and I tried to tell my sister that she promised that she's going to take care of me and she's the older one and I tried to talk her out of it.

And then I saw that she does not really understand me very well so I used a different tactic. I promised her. I said, I'll go with you. But you tell me when you want to go because this way I could keep track of her and I could always persuade her not to do it. I would always tell her, don't do it today.

Look, it's still warm and we'll do it when we can't take it anymore and it's going to get cold. Or I would tell her, don't do it today because today is-- let's say today is going to be-- we are going to get a piece of salami or I would always promise her something good will come out of that day. And so she sort of waited for me that I'm going to go with her and this is how I was able always to keep her from doing this deed and hoping that she will get used to the situation.

But as time went on, the lack of food that we were getting started to take its toll and we were starting to deteriorate. Ours was-- it was not a camp. Birkenau was not a camp that they were sending you to work. It was an extermination camp. They only kept you there long enough until they needed the place for other people to bring in. And as soon as you were deteriorated, they would make selections and take you to the gas chambers.

And realizing this, I started to try-- to eat everything that I were given and I would force my sister to do the same. But then I met a friend of mine. I recognized her. And she was in a different block. And she was very happy to see me because we were friends from the ghetto.

So she told me that I should come to her block, but hers was a children block, only children out there from-- it was from 14 and up. Mostly 14, 15, 13-year-olds. But my sister was already 22 and I was already 19 then, but I looked very thin and skinny, and I didn't look my age because I had been already starving for years before because I was mostly in hiding. We didn't have papers and I didn't have the proper food for a few years.

So she knew that I write poetry and she told me that her block elders likes talented children. She will tell her about me. So I told her, all right. So she asked me whether I have any poems, and I knew all my poems by heart. I didn't-- because we had no pencil and paper there. So I told her, yes, in fact I had some composed already since I'm here in German.

And so she told the block eldest about me, so she called me and she wanted me to recite the poem. And I recited a poem and she said, all right. She said, if you want, you can come and stay in my block. I said, well, I have a sister. And she asked me how old is my sister. And when I told her she said, well, she certainly cannot pass as a child. I said, well, then

I wouldn't come. I would never come without my sister.

So she said, all right, come with your sister and I will pass her off as a [? studentist. ?] But she wasn't a [? studentist ?] because a [? studentist ?] was very wonderful to be because the [? studentists ?] were the ones that were cleaning the blocks and that were also distributing the food. And if you were the one to distribute the food, then you always had a little bit more and you always were trying to get from the bottom of the barrel the potatoes that was [? small ?] [? grown, ?] you know, that wasn't so just watery, that had more potatoes.

So this is how we got to be, and this was block 8. It was the children's block. But this, on the other hand, was a very foolish part on our side because the children were the first ones to deteriorate very quickly and they were the ones to be selected much more often and much sooner. However-- so we went to one selection, which we passed.

And every few weeks we would be taken to disinfect our dresses because we had only this one dress. And we would get another of those wonderful showers, which was always repeated in the same fashion that we really didn't couldn't get clean under terrible conditions that this was conducted. However, the dresses, eventually, since we slept in those dresses and wore them constantly, became full of lice. So they would try to disinfect, not that it helped any.

So we would stand around naked while those dresses were disinfected. The SS with their dogs would guard us, and we would be standing naked while the SS were guarding us with those dogs. Sometimes an hour, sometimes two hours until we would receive our dresses back.

One day after having-- after such a spectacle when the SS was guarding us, they became very restless and the block eldest apparently wanted to-- because she happened to be a very nice woman, wanted maybe to save us from some disaster, told the SS that she has among her children a very talented girl. She's a ballet dancer. And she asked them, would you like to see this girl dance? They said, yes.

So this girl-- she told this girl to dance. She was one of the most beautiful children that I have ever seen. She was about 14 years old and she was dancing. And as she was dancing tears were running down her cheeks because I'm sure that she was remembering when she was dancing to the applause of an audience, when her parents were watching her and had so much pleasure seeing their daughter dance with such talent.

And then when this was over, we received our dresses but they took this child with them and we never expected to see her again. But a few days later, they brought her back and we didn't recognize her. She had been tortured. She had been raped. She was in a daze. She didn't even know that she has to get up in the morning to get out to stand roll call. And if you would not get out from the bunk to stand roll call, then you were beaten to death because roll call--