

Take four.

Can you back up in that story until how she--

Until where?

Until where you were all standing around and the SS became uneasy and the block elder-- started to dance.

Block elder-- I say about the uneasy, too?

Mm-mm.

As we were standing around waiting for our dresses, the SS became very restless and the block elders wanted to distract them, so she told them that she has a talented ballet dancer and would they want her to dance? They agreed that they want her to dance and there she was dancing-- tears ran down her cheeks for she remembered the times when she was dancing on stage to the applause, to an audience, and to the pleasure of her parents, and now she was dancing in this godforsaken place, like in some arena, where there were only dogs and SS watching her.

When we received our dresses, they took this beautiful child with them and we never expected to see her again, because when they took somebody away, they usually killed them and we never saw those people again. But they did bring her back three days later and we couldn't even recognize her. She had been raped and she had been tortured and she was like in a daze. She didn't know that she has to get up in the morning to stand the roll call. And if somebody would have been missing, and if they would find her in the bunk, then she would be beaten to death. So I would pick her up and take her between me and my sister, she should stand. And then, we would watch over her that she should get her portion of food.

But a few days later, there was a selection, and we, luckily, again, passed that's selection. But they took out from that election 500 girls. We remained half and one of those girls was this beautiful ballerina. But she tried to run over to our side and the SS quarter. And with the butt of the rifles, they beat her to death. But it takes a long time for somebody to die when you are beaten to death. And all I remember was praying to God that she should die already.

And her screams were following me forever. She was screaming to God, she was screaming to her mother, nobody could help her. And then, when she was dead, they took all the girls to the gas chamber and they formed like a chain that nobody should be able to run out. And like a chain, in that chain, they escorted them to the gas chambers.

And I promised myself then, that I shall never forget her. And I memorialized her in one of my poems, which I call, Ballerina.

Do you want me say the poem? If not, I go on right now.

Ballerina. Little ballerina, I did not know your name, I only knew one thing that from far away you came. It was said about you that you were once a star, and you were privileged as to sing before the King. Look at what they are doing to this beautiful ballerina. They force her to dance naked, like in some arena.

You blacked out the present and turned back a page, and you made believe you were on stage.

Can you stop for me for a second? Can you stop filming?

Yes.

I need my glasses.

Where can I go back?

How about, arena? Go back to there.

You blacked out the present and turned back a page, and you made believe you were on stage. When the SS stared at you, tears welled in your eyes. You swallow them bravely, and held back your cries. They led you away and brought you back bruised. I knew what they did and how you had been used.

I took your hands in mine, and held them very tight. You opened up your eyes and said you'll be all right. Three days later, I watched you die. You were only 14 and I could not even cry.

I didn't know your name, you beautiful little stranger. Yet we were sisters in the same danger. I curse them with a passion for this awful sin. I don't even know whether you had any kin.

Little Ballerina, I'm naming you, Lori. And in your name, I'm writing this true story. Beautiful young Lori, you surely are in heaven. For this sin against you they will never be forgiven.

She was not the only one that I have seen beaten to death. I have watched so many beaten to death for as little as being-- because one of the girls took out a blanket to cover herself while we were standing at roll call and it was very cold early in the morning. This was enough of a reason to be beaten to death.

After this incident, with the ballerina, the plot and the block eldest, every time there was a selection, she would hide me and my sister in one of the blocks that had-- that was stored with blankets. There were hundreds of hundreds of blankets which were eventually shipped to Germany. So every time there would be a selection, she would send us into that storage place and when the selection would be over, she would take us out.

In a way, I really owe my life and my sister's life to this block eldest. Her name was Fella. But my sister never gave up the idea of wanting to kill herself.

So one day, being very desperate and trying always to find a way that she should live, when they were going everybody would try to hide from going to-- this disinfect, to have the dress disinfecting and have that shower. But I went and I told a girl that because each time they took a different block, then I found out that a certain block was going to be disinfected.

I told her I'll go in her place, she should go into my block just because you have to be counted and she couldn't be standing in that block alone that she should go into my block. And I will go instead of her for if she gives me a piece of bread. I needed that bread to show my sister that-- to make a plausible story.

So I went to be-- to go to that disinfecting place. And when I came home I had hidden that piece of bread, because you can't take along that bread, I hid the bread under my blanket. And when I came back, I told my sister that a group of men-- soldiers, a group of men and I had been engaged and that I had seen my fiance had passed by, and he yelled out to me that he had just seen women and children in their block with women and children and my mother is-- he knows from somebody that my mother and her child is alive and to know that she should believe me she knew that I didn't have bread, that he tore me a piece of bread. So I, before-- I went first I took out the bread and I showed her, look, he even threw me a piece of bread.

So this gave my sister a little hope. Also, another way that in the beginning that I could persuade her that they are still alive was that I across--

We have to reload.

OK, you we're going to tell me another way that you used to try to keep your sister from killing herself?

Yes. In the beginning, when we arrived there was Czech camp across-- but it was separated with also wires. It was electric charged wires. But it was on the other side from us. And we would see there children, women and children. They were from Czechoslovakia, from Theresienstadt. And we envied them so much because they were there, the

mothers with their children. And then this gave us somehow also a hope that there are children and it was such a beautiful thing to see-- little kids.

And I would always show my sister, you see? They were lying because look here are children and here are mothers-- all young women with children. But then, one day we got up and it was empty. They took all the children and all of the mothers, the whole families, and they killed them.

And then I had absolutely no-- no way of convincing my sister. And this is really why I tried to find this other way with going to the to those showers in order to make her believe another story about her child. And later on, I read about there was-- his name was so Wilbur, and he wrote a book because his wife was there with the child and how she was killed and it was one of the best documentaries written in Czech.

So this was another struggle that I really had to not only to save myself that I should live, but that I had to constantly to struggle that my sister should also live. And one day they came and they asked for volunteers. And even though the block eldest always cautioned that nobody should ever volunteer because you don't know for what you're volunteering, I was already so desperate that I decided to volunteer.

They were looking for girls that were still looked half-decent and so I pinched my cheeks they should be red and I bit my lips that they should have color and I did the same thing to my sister and I told them, let's go and line up.

I had no idea for what we were lining up. And they were selecting-- and they were looking like we would be horses. They even looked into our mouths. And they were feeling our-- you know, like touching us and it was very odd because I saw myself from work, but do we need to-- because they said that we will be going to work.

But then my sister was not selected. They selected me and my sister wasn't. And then all of a sudden, I see my sister was just walking back to her-- to the block. And this is when I knew that it is either we will both die or we will-- I don't want to live without my sister, anyway.

So I decided I will just make a run back to my sister. I expected if it would have been me, I would have gone to a different line and lined up again. But my sister was not-- she had no fight. She didn't know how to try to fight her way into anything.

So I just ran out and I decided, if they shoot me, they shoot me. And it was like a miracle till this day, I can never believe that I ran away and that they-- nobody shot me. And when I ran into that block, this was one of the most exhilarating moments in my life because I embraced my sister and yet I expected that she is going to be just as happy, but my sister was in such a depressed mood that she did not-- she didn't-- she couldn't react to anything.

And then the list came over to me and she said to me, you don't know from what you went away. Didn't I caution that you should never volunteer for anything? These girls, they were selected to be sent to be prostitutes for the-- I don't know whether it was for the Germans or whether it was for Polish workers, for whomever.

But later on, I read a book about this-- The Dollhouse or House of Dolls. And there it was described exactly what happened to these girls. They would keep them three months, and after that, each one was killed, always. And before they would kill, them they would beat them terribly and they died terrible deaths. So I really was just lucky that I had-- I mean, that I had the idea of running away.

But then, later on, there was the block eldest told us eventually that the selections were more often always and then there was, she told, us there was not any more going to be any selections, they were just emptying the Auschwitz because the front-- they were losing, on the Russian front, and they were-- the Russians were getting closer. So they would take some camps, they would take on death marches, some they would take to the gas chambers, some-- in some ways they of course, didn't want that there should be any witnesses, so they were trying to kill them in any way they designed.

So when I asked my block eldest, what's going to happen to us? She said, I cannot hide you anymore because they are emptying the block. She said, well, she said some are going to work and some are going to the gas chambers. I'm going

to be honest with you. I said, so where is ours going? She said, I don't know.

I said, are you coming with us? She said no. Then I knew that ours is probably going to the gas chambers, because if it would be going to work, then they would be the last one. So I had no choice. I was just thinking to myself, oh my sister was going to get her wish, but I was very, very upset and very angry because I thought that nobody will ever know how we died, just like we didn't know about what was going to happen to us that nobody will ever find out now.

And they really took us and we were standing already in front of the gas chambers and it was so quiet. You would have thought that we-- nobody was crying, because everybody was really prepared. We knew that if they win, they're going to kill us and if they lose they're going to kill us. But until you live, you still have hope. And I was one of the optimists that always hoped.

And I was holding my sister's hand very tight and I was so angry that I thought to myself, I'm not even-- because I come from a very religious family-- I'm not even going to pray. If this is how we are going to die, I am very angry at God. And then, it was taking very long. Usually, it doesn't take that long. And we were standing and standing and the doors still were not-- they were not opening.

So all of a sudden, one SS comes over and tells the other one in German that they have an order to take a group of girls the next day-- like the next day-- to work. And the gas chambers were not empty. They miscalculated because all the corpses were still inside and it takes a very long time until they take out the corpses. They were very systematic. After they would take out the corpses, they would first clean them and wash the walls because they would usually be bloody and you know from scratching.

So they didn't want to-- the SS didn't want to waste too much time standing guard. So they said, you know what? Let's take these girls, let's take this transport for work and the transport that I had to go to my block-- we'll take them.

So this was just a fluke of fate that we were taken to the railroad station. But before that, they gave each one a coat and they loaded us into the cattle trains, again. And we were traveling for a long time until we reached Nuremberg.

And shall I continue? Until we--

But I was-- I got very sick. I had a high fever and I had all kinds of sores.

Let's stop now, because we're near the end and this is a good place to stop, I think. So we should reload.

I thought you want to ask questions?

Why don't you start where you get put into the truck? So you're taken for work, and then go into how you get sick.

I was very-- I got very sick. I was already sick, but I was-- I didn't give in. And I was running a high fever. I had my mouth was inside full of sauce and pus. And I couldn't stand, so I sat down. And this is the first time when this somehow shocked my sister into realizing that I am-- I am sick.

And she's sort of like just woke up from her depression and she goes over to a nurse-- which that was the biggest no-no. First of all, you were not allowed to approach the nurses. You're not allowed to divulge that you are sick. Because if you're sick, then you're automatically a candidate for being killed, because especially if you're going for work, they want you to be able to work.

But luckily, that we were out of Auschwitz and we were already on the way in the trains and that the trains were moving. And so said, please, can I have a-- he was eating an apple, the SS. Can I have a piece of apple for my sister? He gave her such a slap that she was being thrown all the way back to the other side of the cattle train. And a weak voice I backed her, I said, don't you ever do that again. Please, you know that you're not allowed to. I was lucky that he didn't do more to her.

So this is when she sat down and I was mostly dozing, sleeping, because I was not-- I just was very sick. And she even took off her coat because I was shivering and covered me with her coat and it was like my sister had completely changed in those few hours that she was able to take care of me. And I had all kinds of nightmares, but I'm going to skip them because it would take too long away from the rest of the story.

And we finally arrived to Nuremberg. And this was it was like a paradise, the change from Auschwitz, because we had already running water well we could drink when we wanted and we could wash and we were only two in each bunk-- not 10.

And they assigned us to ammunition factory which was right next to our-- to the concentration camp. It was a concentration camp, of course. It wasn't something-- but in comparison, that we could just drink water or go to the bathroom. In Auschwitz, we couldn't even-- we weren't allowed even to go to the bathroom only when they led us twice a day. This was-- everything was allotted to us.

So but and-- but we still had to stand roll call and be selected for work. But they did not select to the gas chambers there. So my sister was working in the same factory where I was. And one day, as we were standing for roll call, they selected a group of girls to take in to the bakery to bring back bread. And they looked always for girls. For some reason, I looked apparently a little bit better than some of the girls because I was selected, also, to go into town to bring in the bread from them, to take bread from the bakery. And it was loaded on wagons and we were-- it was on the wagon had wheels and we were bringing in these wagons with the SS, of course, guarding us.

I was extremely happy to be selected. But my sister was not selected and I was so mad because she pushed out my sister. She said my sister, "hasslich." "Hasslich," means you're ugly. And she pushed her out. And my sister was one of the most beautiful girls in town. And even at this time, I was always so protective of my sister and I was-- I loved her so much that I couldn't even forgive the SS man just for that word that she said that my sister was "hasslich"-- even in the camp.

So I had hoped that I'll get a chance to steal a bread, and this is like a life saver to have an additional bread because we were constantly we were starving, and all we could think was about food. So I-- and I was always the one, the daring one, so I finally get hold of a bread and being that I had a coat, I put the bread inside my coat.

But the girl next to me was scared and she said-- because there was always a collective punishment. If somebody did anything, then everybody was punished. It wasn't just your punishment, alone. She said you better put back the bread if not, I'll tell on you. I told her, listen, I'll give you half and let's try it and I'm taking the bigger chance. You don't have to know and you will still get half. I'll share it with you.

So I convinced her but when we came into the camp it seemed that we didn't know that the world was so close-- it's nearer and nearer to the end. So they were a little bit more lenient. I mean, these SS did not watch so closely because when we came in with the bread, some other girls ran over and stole a few more bread, but an SS from the ones that were in the camp had seen it and she called the couple and she told them-- she didn't even tell her bring the girls. She just said, we want you to bring back the bread. Go collect the bread.

But the couple was doing-- to do such a thorough job that not only did she try to bring back the bread, but she was finding, also, the girls. She found a girl who had a half a bread, and that girl told her that I had the other half of bread. All I was sorry was that I didn't get a chance at least to eat up my bread. So the girls that she found that had the bread, she brought the bread and the girls.

We were brutally beaten, and I never expected that I'll get out alive from there. They beat me with a wooden spoon that you cook for the whole army which is very thick and very, very long. And only when it was broken she threw it away in disgust and she let me go. But for weeks, I could only sleep on my stomach and I was in agony. And this is how I had to go also to work and I couldn't sit I was always seated on the edge.

And the bombs were falling constantly because they were trying to hit the barracks, but they hit-- they never hit-- and the factories. They never hit the camp. But they hit the factories and they hit the kitchen. But first, then the kitchen. So

when they hit the kitchen, we didn't have much to eat. They still-- for the SS, they brought in from. But we went without food three days in a row. And we stayed only in the bunker and we would come out. It was already winter and we would just eat some snow.

And after three days, we were lined up to get a potato. And this was all the food that we got. But then, they couldn't stay any longer because the factory was out of commission. And so they loaded us again on the trucks-- on the cattle trains. And they took us to Holleischen, that was Sudetengebiet. It was at one time Czechoslovakia, but now it was occupied by the Nazis.

And there, again, we were in a concentration camp. And they took us again to work. But it didn't take long and they bombed again the factory. So they didn't have anywhere to take us. They would take us to work by taking-- just moving stones from one place to another-- huge stones which were very heavy and dig ditches and make road blocks and all kinds of-- even Sundays, they would come in and take us out and say do you think that you're going to be spoiled here and chase us on.