

Sorry, Cecilie Klein-Pollack. [INAUDIBLE].

Are there incidents of resistance or sabotage that you can recall maybe from the times that you were working or even from the times in Auschwitz or anywhere along the way?

In Auschwitz, I did not work, but there were-- I was not part of it, but there was an organized, active group that not only was sabotaging but that they were connected with the underground. They collected information, and that was mostly possible by people who worked in-- they called it Canada, where-- and the ones that were-- when you came, your name was registered. They kept records. They hid those records, and there was also some that tried to escape, which, unfortunately, were, most of the time, caught.

And my husband, who was a survivor, was in Buna, and he was present at many hangings that were-- and those were hangings not just for the-- for other things, not just for sabotage but some that were caught, and they hanged them. And the ones that worked in Canada-- they were connected, and did all the recording, and passed on the information. I, personally, myself-- I cannot say that I was could possibly have been involved because I was never in this kind of capacity that I could have had a chance.

What about spiritual resistance of people that you saw around you or that you knew?

Do you mean in a religious way?

In a religious way.

Yes, in a religious way, they would be praying, and even I-- that food was one of the most important sustenance of you of your life. And you couldn't give up not even the least little bit. When it came, I fasted in Auschwitz. That's practically suicide, but I could not make myself eat on Yom Kippur. So I had fasted the whole day.

And I didn't have a prayer book. I prayed in my mind to God, and what happened was that I could be doubly mad at God because that-- it's a [NON-ENGLISH], it's called, what the food comes in. The block eldest put away for those girls. There wasn't the only one because quite a few of us fasted, that we should have it when the fast was finished. And then we found that it was stolen, and we had nothing to eat. And in the [INAUDIBLE], I was very angry, and I got a very angry poem that day in German. But I did. I fasted.

When you think back, can you think of some of your sensory impressions, what things meant a lot to you, what kinds of sound do you remember, or maybe things visually that were important, or smells?

Well, unfortunately, the smell was [? most-- ?] was the burning of those bodies. And then it was the people that, unfortunately, had dysentery, and it was an awful way to-- certainly us had to smell.

And we watched a lot of those people die, and they would be-- and this happened. Many were beaten to death just for that alone because they could not keep their bowels. And they had no way of going to a bathroom.

And then that's the music that was playing, which was a mockery. In a place where they were killing daily, they had this band of music consisting of prisoners that were forced to play music as they marched to work, and from work, and bringing back bodies killed while working because they were beaten to death.

My husband told me-- no, I'll have to describe to you just one scene, and that is my brother-in-law in Israel. This will show the brutality and the absolute-- that you have to have even imagination to think up this kind of punishment.

My brother was terribly hungry, and he saw the dog-- he was working, and there was this dog, had a lot of food, and he ate. And then he walked away, and there was left a little piece, some food in the dog dish. My brother-in-law was also a very courageous person. He always got into trouble because of that, but he always tried to-- they called it organize, organize some food.

So he stole himself, and he took this piece of food, what the dog had left over. The SS came out with this dog, was his dog, and now my brother-in-law knew that now he's going to be-- because they were trained to tear people apart, and some would do it as a sport. And this happened-- I didn't witness it, but there are people that witnessed it. My present husband had witnessed something similar.

And anyway, my brother-in-law was ordered by this SS-- he brings out the dog, and he tells him to kneel in front of the dog and ask the dog's forgiveness, call the dog Herr, like Mister, and tells him, you dirty swine, you-- all kinds of-- and while he is telling him that-- so he's telling him that he is going to let the dog tear him to pieces and is whipping him.

And then the SS behind are laughing because they like to see this Jew calling a dog Herr, Mister, and tells him to beg for his life. And my brother-in-law figured first, if he's not going to do it, he just wanted to play a little bit for time because he was really terribly scared. He only wished that he could a different death.

But luckily, for some reason, he just beat him and beat him until he was senseless, and then some friends of his were allowed to take him away from there. And he wasn't torn to pieces. This is the life that people had to endure while they were in camp, and I had watched two girls being beaten to death for a few raw potatoes. And that was in Holleischen.

They took us to-- there was a field, and it was on a Sunday. And they needed potatoes for the kitchen, for the SS kitchen, so they selected a lot of girls, and my sister, too, quite a lot of people to dig out the potatoes from the field.

And as we were digging out-- [? Binka ?] had a coat, but my coat had a hood. So I took two potatoes, and I put it in the tip of my hood. And I put the hood on my head because it was still cold. And there were other girls, and two sisters were standing. They were also-- and they took potatoes, and they put them in their pocket, each one maybe two potatoes.

My sister was terribly frightened, so I told her, you know what, we are not going to stand together because I was afraid she will keep looking at me, looking at me, that this would give me away. I told her that she should stand behind me because I was afraid if she would stand in front of me she should turn her head. I thought of everything to bring in those-- how to bring in those two potatoes, those three potatoes.

So I wasn't standing with my sister. I stood with somebody else. My sister was standing behind me, and these were also two sisters. And they were standing together, and each had a couple of potatoes.

Why don't you do the potato story?

From the beginning?

Yeah. Do the [INAUDIBLE] take the potatoes [INAUDIBLE].

We were a group of girls-- among them was my sister, myself, and many others-- digging out potatoes or taken to dig out potatoes for the SS kitchen. On the way back, I decided to help myself to a couple of potatoes. I had a coat with a hood, so I put the two potatoes in my hood.

[? Binka ?] was afraid that-- my sister was very frightened that I should be caught. I told her that she should stand with somebody else and she would stand behind me because I was afraid, if she'll stand in front of me, she will turn back, and that could give me away.

And in front of me was standing two other sister's side by side, and as we were coming back to our block, they started to search us. And I never expected that they would start searching for a couple of potatoes, but they found-- nobody else really had. It was only those two girls and me.

So they found the potatoes by those two sisters, and they took out-- first of all, they had to throw the potatoes to the floor, and then they were beating them, and beating them, and beating them. And then they were already unconscious. They took four girls. Each one had to take them, one by the head, one by the foot, and didn't bring them back to our

block. But they had to bring them into the SS quarters, and we never saw those two sisters again. That means that they killed them.

Now, while I saw how they were being beaten, I saw myself already-- that this is going to happen to me. And my feet was just-- I was just shaking inside, but I was very lucky. They searched my pockets, and they never thought of searching my hood. So I brought in those potatoes.

And those potatoes left such an impression on me, that this I will have to-- because it really has a psychological impact. First of all, when I was eating these potatoes, I told my sister, they taste like nuts. My sister said, they taste like apple. We couldn't understand why in our lives, when we were outside and free, how come we never ate raw potatoes.

I made up my mind that, as long as I live, I'm going to eat raw potatoes because there is nothing more tasty than raw potatoes. I also shared it with the girls that was on my block, on my bed because I couldn't be that selfish.

But then, when we were liberated-- my first trip, when everybody was running, and they opened up the ladders, and they opened up where they had the salamis in the storage places, my first trip was to run to the field. I was digging feverishly. I dug up loads of potatoes. My sister first didn't know where I am because she was smart enough to go and came brandishing bread with salami, and she couldn't find me.

Then it occurred to her to come to the field, and I wouldn't budge from those potatoes until I didn't bring them into the block. And I was the only one that didn't bring bread or salami because it was all gone by the time I had lugged in all those potatoes because this is what these potatoes meant to me at that time.

You and your sister rescued each other. Can you talk about that kind of rescue as a common thing, and also, was there the opposite of that?

I could have never survived and my sister could have never survived without each other. My whole focus and life became my sister, and I could only fight to live as long as my sister lived. And this was vice versa because eventually my sister in Nuremburg-- when this happened to me in the train, my sister became more-- she became better. She somehow recuperated enough to help me and not think so much anymore of suicide.

And she was a great help already in that way that I could already-- let's say, if I had to fight for the food or to get something additional, that I didn't have to worry that my sister is, in the meantime, going to kill herself. And there is nobody-- everybody had to have somebody in order to survive.

For instance, my late husband, who was alone-- they were like brothers. He adopted like one friend, that they took care of each other. Then one of the brothers wanted, also-- because one of the brothers died, and he was so despondent. He wanted to run to the electric wires. My husband saved him, wouldn't let him go.

And then when my husband was on the train, it was those open trains where they took them after death marches. But this was like a death match because it was in the winter, and you were traveling without food, without water. And it was snowing and freezing, and my husband lost for a while his mind. And he was trying to jump off the train, so his friend and his brother, the one that eventually died, sat on him. They sat on him that he shouldn't jump.

So you always had to have somebody that would help you survive. If you were alone, you were never interested any further than the next person. You couldn't because you became so completely absorbed only in your day-to-day survival that you could not get any further. Nobody knew your name. We were called the Two Good Sisters because we wouldn't-- because it came to a point that even sisters would take away each other's food.

And with us, it was that we would fight only that the next one should take a bite more or she should have more. She would cry why I didn't eat up my bread because I was afraid-- after we didn't eat like for three days and we had that experience, I was trying to save up a piece of bread in case we are not going to have the next day

And then, if there was a search-- so they were not allowed to find. If they would find the bread, they would take it away,

and they would still beat me up. So I would beg my sister, help me eat. Help me eat. They're going to beat me up if they find bread. So she would cry why she has to-- that she's eating my bread, and I will have that much less, and I may die sooner, or I won't survive, or I'll get sick.

Yes, we could only-- and everybody had to have somebody, and if you didn't, then you didn't survive, no matter how strong you were, unless had some kind of a choice position like block eldest, or stubenalteste, or kapo. Then you could survive. Otherwise, it was not possible.

Define kapo for me. I've never heard of a kapo, [? let's say. ?]

A kapo was in charge of all the blocks, not only of one block. Block eldest, was who was in charge of the block itself. She was responsible to the kapo or to the SS. The couple was responsible to the SS. We were called [NON-ENGLISH]. [NON-ENGLISH] is slaves, but we were less than slaves.

So we could never approach or talk to an SS. There was no such thing. You would be killed if you would. That's why I was so upset that my sister spoke directly to this SS. So a kapo was over the whole camp responsible. The block eldest was over each block, and the stubenalteste was over the-- you should make your bed. It should be clean. You had to make your bed. And she would sweep out, and she would distribute the food. And these were the functions and--

How did you-- how could one become one of those?

It was appointed by the SS, but the kapo, let's say, could appoint a block eldest, or the SS could appoint the block eldest. But stubenalteste was appointed by the block eldest, and they had the same power and the same-- they could kill you. They could beat you up. They didn't have to account to anybody into anything, and some became very vicious.

And I don't even-- I know that some of the prisoners then killed these kapos when they had a chance or some, even, block eldest. But I, myself, cannot-- not that I condone it, but I cannot blame them that much because whatever they were-- whatever they were they became because of the treatments that they--

Let's just talk a little more about kapos. Could kapos have a good effect? Could they be good kapos or bad kapos? In some of your experiences, the block eldests helped.

For instance, my block eldest helped me, but I'm sure that many probably hated her because when my sister, who lives in Israel, had seen her once and recognized her in Hadassah. She was dressed as a nurse. She was working there.

And my sister wanted to run over to her to thank her because she really saved us, but when she called [? Vela ?], she said [? Vela ?], she said, I'm not [? Vela ?], I'm not [? Vela ?]. She so scared-- and she ran away-- that my sister thought she'll do her a favor then. If she doesn't want to be recognized, then she should not pursue it.

So apparently she must have felt that there was also in her life that she did-- but I definitely know that she could not help it because, as I said, if you have to be-- when you have 1,000 people, and you have to keep order, you have to see that they should stand straight, and in line, and nobody should ever take out a blanket, and nobody should to ever be missing, and nobody should ever go without your permission to a bathroom, how can you control unless with fear and unless with beating and yelling. And this is what they did.

As I said, I could never be one because I would be killed much before because I could never be brutal. My husband was a very gentle and very wonderful and kind person. He couldn't do this job, so he didn't except. He would rather die than be brutal to other people or hard on other people.

And yet my present husband, who was-- he was the longest prison. He was on Buchenwald for five and a half years. He told me that they were very brutal but that then there were a kapo that they would be very mean, and hit, and do everything when the SS was around, but when the SS left, he would-- and they worked very hard.

They worked in the mines, and I don't know whether coal mines or salt mines, that they had to bring-- I don't know--

some very heavy stuff up. And they had to run with it, and both sides would be SS. And while they were running, they would hit them, and a lot of them just died, never got back to their camp again.

But if the SS were not around, this kapo would say, OK, relax, don't have to work now so hard. But as soon as he would see the SS, you would scream, you filthy dog, get on with your work, you better do it faster, and scream, and carry on, and make a lot of noise. So you had two kinds of kapo.

But most of them were not very good. They couldn't be good. I know somebody that is, in fact, from my late husband's town. He's a brilliant man. He is a doctor of philosophy, and he was a very religious man. And he was a kapo, and he had to hide for many months. People wanted to kill him because he was so brutal.

In all your experiences, did you do anything for relief? Could you ever laugh? Was there ever-- did you--

While I was there?

Yeah.

While I was there? Nobody, not only me. There was no laughter. You couldn't even-- but you couldn't afford to cry either because if you let yourself really believe and think that this is what happened, you pushed away-- I just was not going-- I used to dream a lot about my mother, but I would force myself-- I was very attached to my mother, but I would force myself not to think about it. I would think about anything, always what I'm going to do after I get out. I never wanted to think that I'm going to die there.

I would constantly-- like I would say a poem. This is how I would repeat the two addresses in Palestine because that time it was Palestine-- now it's-- thank God-- Israel-- my brother's address and my sister's address. This was all I was thinking, that I shouldn't forget their addresses because when I survive, I want to send them a cable that they should know, and I will go to join them with my sister.

And I never let myself think what happened to my sister, what happened to my brother, what happened to-- I just was thinking-- besides, you were always so hungry and starving. You could think of two things, either what you're going to do, or what you would like to eat, or what-- or I remember what my mother used to cook and how I would love to have it, or I would talk to my sister about. You remember this? You remember? This is what we're going to do.

And this is all that I allowed myself to do. If not, I couldn't have-- nobody could, under those circumstances, survive. And we almost didn't survive because it was everything prepared in Holleischen, that they were going to burn down our camp.

Can you talk a little bit about the age of the people who survived? Were you pretty much doomed if you were a child and doomed if you were--

Yes.

In a real basic way, as though I'm new to this.

Children had no chance to survive. I would say, yeah, unless they were-- they had their [NON-ENGLISH]. That means-- there would be, let's say, a block eldest or-- a messenger. They would keep a little, very young girl as a messenger, and everybody would love her because she's so cute. And so she would be like protected by the-- so a girl like that would have a chance to survive. Otherwise, from very young age, like from one year up to 14, 15, they had no chance to survive unless they were in different camps, but not where I was.

And what about adults?

Adults had slim chances, but still, as you see, some survived. And it would be only the ones that-- the ones that had spirit, that really wanted to live, that didn't want to give in. Otherwise, it had nothing to do with age, and it had to do,

also, with luck.

For instance, my late husband always remembered one young man that was-- he had a lot of willpower to live, and he was very religious. And he deeply believed in God, and he even believed that, whatever is happening now, he didn't blame nothing on-- because God has a purpose. He believed that there is a purpose in everything.

And he was with my husband on this death march, train march, whatever. When the train would pull in, they would chase them out. And they would sit in the snow to rest, and then they didn't have any more-- no, they were-- they expected to get some buses or something, but then they decided that these trains are going to continue.

So they started. They told them they should run, and whoever can run into the train is going to live. And this religious man-- my husband made it, and who didn't make it was shot on the spot so that they had less people. And he was already by the train. My husband already gave him the hand to pull him in, but because he didn't make it on the train, he was killed. They shot him.

And my husband always would light a candle for this man because he-- you never know who has family left or who didn't because families were wiped out to the last. So my husband-- my husband wasn't religious after this, and he always told me about it. And he always remembered this young man with so much spirit, and with so much hope, and with so much belief, and he died. It was really, very, very shortly before the liberation.

We're about to run out. We should re-load.