

Mrs. Page, tell me what happened when the Germans arrived at your door to arrest your mother. Describe to me that incident and what happened.

I was in our apartment alone at the time. My mother went downstairs to attend to someone who was sick in the building. You know, my mother was a physician. And there was a tremendous knock on the door, and I went to open.

This was very early stages of the war, so we were not used to it any-- yet. This was November, 1939, early November. And I opened the door, and I saw one German, whatever he was, some kind of an officer, and three men dressed in black uniforms of the local Germans, who were, of course, the traitors to Poland. And they collaborated, and before the war, and with the Ger-- and collaborated during the war with the occupiers.

And they came, and the man said that we are-- where is my mother? In the meantime, my mother ran up the steps and came to the apartment. And they said that she's arrested on political grounds. And they said to take just a few warm things and put all the valuables, money, jewelry on the table.

And we didn't know. I was not on the list. So my mother told me, why don't you go to your boyfriend? I said, I don't want to go to my boyfriend. I want to go with you. You know? And she told me to put the valuables on the table. No, she did it. She did it.

And then we went to the bedroom to collect our warm things, just a few things they let us have. And she said to me in Russian, my mother was Russian originally, she said to me, throw this-- she had it in a little sack-- throw it in the toilet and flush the water. And I, as an obedient daughter, did that.

And they took us to-- they closed the apartment. They sealed it. And they took us to a place which was actually my high school. And there I saw-- I thought that we were only arrested. Because deportations were not with it-- they were not-- we didn't know about deportations yet. This was just November, you know? And we realized that there were maybe-- later we found out about a thousand people, both Polish Catholics and Jews from Poland.

I would say that this was the intelligentsia of the city. They tried, the Germans tried to quell any kind of resistance, and they did the same thing in all the cities. The very beginning, they tried to get rid of the people who would provide, who would resist or something like that.

And they put us in trains. At that time, there was passenger trains. There were no cattle trains yet. And they took part of us to the city of-- part of the transport to the city of Czestochowa and the other part, which I was-- and my mother and I were in it, to Krakow, the city of Krakow.

OK, let's stop for just a second. OK, Mrs. Page, I want you to tell me that same story again but as though you haven't told it to me before, so that's how the Germans arrived at your door to arrest your mother.

Mhm. It was November, I think 11, 1939, early evening, and I was alone in the apartment. My mother had to go downstairs to attend to some patient in our apartment house. And I heard a knock or a ring, or the bell rang. I don't remember exactly.

I went to open the door, and there were three Germans altogether. One was in a green uniform. I assume it was SS. In those days, I didn't distinguish it so clearly. You know? He was older-- and two younger men dressed in the dark uniforms of the local Germans, who were now within the German army, and who before collaborated with the Germans, and basically were traitors before the war.

And one of them said that-- my mother, in the meantime, came upstairs, running up because someone probably let her know that the Germans are knocking on the door. And they told her that she's arrested on political grounds. And I was not on the list. They said I can go.

But my mother told me to go and see-- to my boyfriend's house. First of all, I couldn't have gone anyway because there

was a curfew, and I couldn't move from the house. But I wouldn't go anyway. I told her I want to stay with her.

And they told us to take a few warm things, put all the valuables and jewelry on the table. And as we were getting ready, my mother, in those days, being aware of the Germans and trying to be ready just in case, had her jewelry in a tiny little sack. And she told me, take this, and throw it in the toilet, and flush the water. And I did it.

Then we went out. They sealed the apartment. And they took us to a building, which was my pre-war high school which I graduated from, in the big gym, in the big, big room. I realized that there were many, many people. Later, we found out it was about a thousand, both Polish Catholics and Polish Jews.

It was like an elite of the city. I realized that too over there, which was we-- which we understood later that probably the Germans wanted to get rid of all the sources of resistance at first, the leaders. They did it in every city or every town that they were in. This was their-- the procedure they went by.

And then they put us in-- on the trains, passenger trains at the time because it was early days of the war. And they took us. Part of the transport went to the city of Czestochowa, which is famous for its Black Madonna. And our part of the transport went to the city of Krakow.

We were put in an old Polish fortress in the city of Krakow, from medieval times, I think. And we were put on straw, on straw, not even mattresses, just straw. And we were received by the Jewish community representatives, and the Polish Catholics were received by the Red Cross.

And of course, we had no money. We had just the basic, basic necessities. So we were uprooted. We were in terrible despair. We didn't know what deportation meant at the time because this was without precedent. This was the very first in our city and, I think, in whole occupied Poland, one of the very first ones.

Describe the difference between the ghetto in Krakow and the ghetto in Warsaw.

Well, oh, I know. We were in the ghetto of Krakow. But by that time, I was already married. And the ghetto of Krakow comparing to ghetto of Warsaw was not as terrible. When my mother could not stay with-- she stayed with us in Krakow during the pre-ghetto days. When ghetto was established, or even before that, people who came after September 1939 to Krakow who were not before that then had to leave the city. And they could choose any city or town within the Generalgouvernement, which was not the Deutsches Reich, the German Reich proper.

So she chose to go to Warsaw. And for maybe twice, I went to visit her with a special permission. In those days, you had to get a special permission to be able to. And I traveled by train.

And even then, before the ghetto was not closed in Warsaw-- I was not there when the ghetto was closed. I was there before it was closed-- but all the Jews lived within a certain district. And it was just terrifying. People were already hungry. People were in rags.

There was such a sense of despair over there. My mother was still practicing medicine over there all alone. We tried to bring her to Krakow to us, but it was absolutely impossible.

In Krakow, like on the other hand, we were all working for the German war effort, of course. There were deportations, but it was not as terribly gloomy. And first of all, we were not that hungry. Somehow, everybody managed to eat in those days of the ghetto. In Warsaw, hunger was there from the beginning, even before the ghetto was closed.

OK, we have to reload.

OK.

OK.

So but don't worry about that. You don't have fill in the chronological details.

Mhm.

Now, I'm just going to ask you, who was Oscar Schindler, and what did he do? Describe him too.

OK. Oscar Schindler was a German industrialist who came to the occupied city of Krakow in the early days, I think already maybe September 1939. I don't know exactly, maybe October. Like many Germans, he was not a military man.

He belonged to the Nazi Party, but he was an industrialist who lived-- he was from Sudetenland in Czechoslov-- which was the German-- with the German population of Czechoslovakia. You see? He came to Krakow, I think, looking for possibilities to do business. This was occupied territory, and so on.

Anyway, he took a small-- he took over because each Jewish business had to have some kind of a German, like an overseer. I don't know the exact term for that. So he took over a Jewish enamel factory which produced pots and pans at the beginning.

And he started to employ, first of all, Poles. And then I think he got acquainted with the bookkeeper, who was the main bookkeeper of that factory. And he kind of liked him. And I think that bookkeeper, and maybe Mr. Schindler himself, realized it would be very good to employ some Jewish labor. And he did so.

He was a very, very warm man. And from the beginning, the Jews who worked for him worshiped him because he was kind and was such a contrast to everybody else. In the whole history of war, I didn't know anyone like him. I didn't work for him at the time. But those Jews who did-- excuse me-- had this opinion of him.

My mother-in-law had-- was an interior decorator. And this is I'm talking about pre-ghetto days. And one day, he came over to her apartment, recommended by one of-- some other Jewish acquaintances of hers, that he had a new apartment. He moved into an apartment, and he would like her to decorate it for him.

In Poland, before the war, you didn't buy ready-made things. Everything was made to order, like drapes, and tablecloths, and everything. And this gave my husband's family, his parents, his sister, and myself-- you know, I was married to him in February of 1940-- means of survival because he paid for all the services for everything and, besides, was very, very kind. So would you like me to tell you what hap--

Why don't you describe him to me? What did he look like?

Physically?

Yeah.

He was a very tall man, a little, I would say, kind of broad-shouldered, very blond, very blue-eyed, and had this air of such goodness emanating from him. I remember later on when we were in the camp, which he established in Sudeten at the very end of the war. You know, we were always freezing when we saw a German because it meant that either there would be shooting, or there would be beating, or there would be some other kind of torture of moral or physical.

But when he came, all we could see was Herr Direktor. We used to call him Herr Direktor. And he smelled awfully good. And he was always dressed beautifully and always dropping cigarettes all over. He was smoking a cigarette and then put butts around so the people could pick it up and smoke it. Because, of course, they didn't have any cigarettes. You know? People loved to work for him.

Later on, after this original period of time in Krakow in that factory, when the ghetto was established, he decided to have his people, his workers live on the premises. He had his camp, his own little factory. And on the premises, the workers were living.

They worked very hard. Because to work with enamelware, I understand they had to carry these heavy enamel pots, and there was a night shift and the day shift. But they were fed. Even though it was not easy to feed people in those days, they were fed.

They were never, never harassed. Because the Germans who guarded the camp were not allowed to do things which they didn't ask for permission to do in regular camps, because Direktor Schindler was bribing them, giving them presents, and so on. They were always treated humanely. So it was such a privilege to work for him that it was like a gift from God in those days to be able to work for Oscar Schindler in comparison to have to work in camps like we did in Plaszow.

What was Schindler's list, and how big was it?

At the end of the war, 1944, around October, we realized that the camp in Plaszow would be liquidated because the Russians were approaching, and the Germans were retreating. So they were liquidating all the camps around.

But Schindler wanted to protect his people. He decided-- he went on kind of a fact-finding trip to Sudetenland, which was his home, to a small, like a-- it wasn't even a town. It was a village, almost, called Brnenec in Czech. In the German, it was Brnnlitz. And there he acquired two factories.

We have to stop--

Yeah.

--for the helicopter, I think.

OK.

OK, so now, tell me how Schindler was going to try to rescue more people toward the end.

First of all, he put on the list-- this was how the-- actually, not Schindler, but the administration of the Camp Plaszow to which his factory and the adjoining quarters were belonged to, they belonged to the Camp Plaszow, so the administration of the Camp Plaszow started preparing the list.

The list consisted mainly of his workers which were employed at his enamel fabryk-- it was Emalia, called Emalia. Then also there was another businessman in the camp of Plaszow called Julius Madrich, for whom I worked at the time. He was also very good to his workers, not like Schindler, by no means.

And when the end of the war and the Russians started to approach and the Germans wanted to liquidate the camps and retreat, Schindler-- they were very good friends, Schindler and Madrich. And Schindler approached Madrich to do the same thing, to join forces and locate-- relocate all the workers to the two factories in Sudetenland.

But Madrich refused. He said, I did everything for my Jews, whatever was possible. But now, that's the end. I cannot do anything else. So Schindler went alone.

But from the list of Madrich workers, he picked up also a number of Madrich workers. It was a very difficult process because everybody wanted to get on that list. And this way, he-- I think, it was about 1,300 people that he was able to relocate to Sudeten.

What did the list represent? If you were on the list, were you safe?

Well, there was no safety under German occupation. There was no safety because these people had-- they were torturers, murderers. There was no logic in it, no reason in it. This was just pure hatred and pure murder all the time.

But Schindler assumed that if his workers would work for the war effort-- and he changed it in Brnnlitz. He changed

his production to production of shells from enamelware. Because he had to prove, really, because they arrested him twice because they didn't think that he was working for the war effort, and so on.

So we were doing-- making shells, and we were supposed to polish these shells. But all the production was faulty. Because we, on purpose, were sabotaging this. They were never as they ought to be, always was something flawed in those shells during our months in BrÄ¼nnlitz.

And this is how he could save us, proving that his factory was indispensable for the war effort. He had connections always. He knew how to-- he was always very well liked by Germans as well. And he always used to give them presents and do favors for them. So--

We have to reload.

OK.

I want you to talk to me a little bit more about the sabotage. Was Schindler involved himself into that?

Oh, he knew about it, of course. He knew that the production was faulty, and he was absolutely involved in everything.

Was he the mastermind? Tell me whether it was--

I tell you the truth. I really don't know that much about it. I think that my husband would be able to give you more details on that because he himself was more involved in that than I was. I was just polishing my shells. But we knew that there was sabotage going, and this was about six months before the war when we-- before the end of the war when we arrived there in BrÄ¼nnlitz, and that's how it turned out to be.

Cut the playing for a minute.

Going out from Plaszow.

Yeah.

Yeah.

OK.

In some time, the beginning of November, my husband and I found out that we were on the list. We were very happy. We didn't know what will await us. But we knew that we were going to go to something better than anything that we could conceive at the time.

The men left a week before the woman did. And later, we found out that they did not go directly to BrÄ¼nnlitz. They went to Gross-Rosen, which they stayed there I think a few days. And this was a very, very difficult camp. But they finally arrived in BrÄ¼nnlitz.

The woman, on the other hand, we left a week later. And we were in the cattle trains, of course packed like sardines. And we were going. We didn't know where we going. We assumed we're going to go to BrÄ¼nnlitz directly.

All of a sudden, we landed at this very famous now platform, train platform at a station in Auschwitz with the SS surrounding like mad people, with dogs barking all over. And they started to push us out of trains and run us to a selection, through a selection process, which was, by itself, terrible.

We had to undress completely. I clutched-- in those days, I already wore glasses. And I clutched them in my hand. Because I knew if I don't have glasses, I won't be able to do any work. I won't be able to see very well. So I clutched. And thank God, no one ever discovered.

Some woman had their heads shaven. I didn't, just cut short. So I don't know how they did it, probably just picked certain people. And of course, the Germans were making-- laughing and making dirty jokes. And it was just terrible. We were completely not prepared for this because we thought we going to Mr. Schindler, to his camp.

Then they took us to their so-called "sauna" to a delouse-- you know, getting rid of lice, delousing process. We had to put all our clothes and our bundles, everything, in one room, get undressed, go through the showers, then go through to get our clothes.

And the clothes were on the heap, and each one of us picked whatever we could. I remember I got some kind of a white shirt, some rag, which was probably from somebody dead already, and some kind of a dress, no underwear, and of course no shoes. I had to take the clogs, wooden clogs.

Then we were led-- this was Birkenau. We were led to the barracks. We arrive there, everybody in despair. But at the moment when we were picking our clothes and we put them on-- how strong human nature is in spite of everything you go through. Or maybe this was youth. We were young at the time. We started to laugh hysterically in that room where we were putting on those clothes. Because we couldn't see ourselves because there, of course, there were no mirrors. But we looked so ridiculous that we started to laugh hysterically.

And I forgot to say that before that, in the sauna, of course there was no hot water. Forget that. But there was no soap of any kind, just freezing water. November in Poland is very, very cold. And so there were no toilet paper, no paper at all in the latrines.

Then after we got dressed, they took us to the barracks in Birkenau. The mud in Birkenau at the time-- and probably in Auschwitz maybe not so because the roads and the streets in Auschwitz, within Auschwitz were paved, more or less. But in Birkenau, you walked, and the clogs stayed in the mud. And you kept on walking. You know, it was just terrible.

We arrived. And in Plaszow, we slept like two to a bunk. There, I think we were 10, or 11, or 13. We were sleeping like sardines. They give us some kind of an old, dirty comforter. And all of a sudden, in that barracks, somebody called my name.

This was my friend. She was on the upper bunk. She came with a transport before us, a couple of months before us. And she was working for a German office, in the office anyway. And she gave me a piece of bread with honey at the time. I will never forget it because I never got it again.

We didn't know anything about what happened to our men. We assumed the same fate happened to them in some other camp. And we were waiting. I think that all of us would have died even before being gassed because we were all terribly sick with dysentery. We were terribly hungry.

And we couldn't-- the terrible food that they gave, some very watery soup with a few bits inside and a tiny piece of bread every day, which also caused our dysentery-- this was this kind of bread. We were all sick. So I don't think if Oscar Schindler after three weeks through his trying to get us out, through his connections and presence that he gave all around and everything, I don't think we would have survived.

So finally, after about three weeks-- I think we lost the count of time over there-- they told us someone came, probably a Blockalteste or some German, I don't remember exactly, and started to call our names. Well, that was already good because we knew we are the 300 womans and-- woman, and she called us by name. We didn't know what she wants us for.

But they led us to a side, a train station like on the sideline, and they put us in the trains, again packed like sardines. Of course, no toilets. There was a pail in the middle. No food. We didn't get any food. I don't know if some of us had a little piece of bread from Birkenau we hid.

And after a while, the train started to go. We were only guessing. We didn't know where we going. Because, first of all,

there are no windows in the cattle cars. We stopped. I think, on the way, the German soldiers let us go out for a while to-- and we had some snow that we took from the ground and kind of-- instead of a drink.

And finally, we arrived in some very desolate station. And it said BrÄ½nilitz. It said BrÄ½nilitz. So of course, we were terribly excited that finally we arrived at our destination. But in the background, we saw some very tall chimneys.

And as we marched to Schindler's camp, which we assumed would be Schindler's camp, we marched by fives. And I was walking among other friends with a girl who came originally from Germany. But she was deported from Germany to Poland, and in Poland to camp in Plaszow, and with us to Birkenau and to Schindler's camp.

Her name was Margot. And she said to me, oh, my god, now we going to die. Do you see these chimneys? And I said-- I always get upset. And I said to her, Margot, we cannot die. Because if we would be destined to die, we would die in Birkenau. I was always an optimist. And finally, we were marching and marching. And we came to a building, which was--

Mrs. Page, wait just a minute. OK?

OK. I'm sorry.