

[BEEP] Can you tell me again how you felt at the moment of the escape? How your fear left you and how you felt?

At the moment of the escape, everybody was very nervous and very shaky. But there was no way back. You had to go. One pushed the other. It wasn't easy. But actually, we didn't have time to really think and sort out our thoughts. But it was you have to go and you try to survive. Even if you hop all over bodies, you don't look back.

Everything happened split second. There was no time to think. You were afraid. You were scared. You were nervous. You were shaky. But you didn't think. Just go as far as you can in those few moments.

It was very fortunate for us that the woods were right ne-- that we were in the woods. And the field between the camp and the woods wasn't too big. My legs were like rubbery. They couldn't even run. But I did.

I remember I grabbed the girl to hold down. And when it's meant for you to survive or to live, you have to believe. I'm a strong believer. I never gave up my faith. And I grabbed her. Sarah was her name. And she saw that I'm bleeding. And so she pushed me away and she said, I want to live. And as she said I want to live, a bullet hit her.

It was meant for her to die. It was meant for me to live. I don't know why. She wasn't worse than I am. I wasn't better than she was. It's just you have to believe. You have to have the faith, because I realize that my faith helped me an awful lot.

Were there people who betrayed you when you were in the camp?

No. No. I never had that. No, no, no.

Now, let's go back to before the war.

Just one thing I want to add on, as I ran with my group, after three days, three nights of walking, we came back to Sobibor. We walked in circles. We didn't know. And then we started all over again, to run. Yeah.

Let's go back to-- let's do one other thing. What happened to Sobibor after?

They erased everything-- they killed all the people who remained. They caught them or whatever. A lot of didn't even go. They didn't want to. They had given up. They lost all their families. They just didn't care.

And they erased every trace. They dismantled everything. And they plant little pine trees. You know, it's already going to be soon 50 years, 49 years, that we escaped. Those pine trees, the way they plant them, they never grow. They're just the same size. I go back to Sobibor almost every year now.

Now, tell me about before the war, how life changed for you, what you remember of the--

I remember everything. I had a very happy life. We were two children. My father wasn't rich. But he was middle class, comfortable middle class. I finished public school. I went to business school. And I never finished because the war came.

And I had a big family, lots of cousins and aunts and uncles, besides friends. And I had a very happy life. And all of a sudden, everything was gone. And I was left alone. My father was shot in 1939. When the first unit of SS came into our city, they picked out-- they told the people to report to the main place there in our city, the rich people, not so rich people, the educated people, the important people. And it was 600 and some. And they shot-- my brother went with them. And they shot them all. My brother pretended that he's dead, that he got shot and came back. That was right away 1939, December.

And then tell me the incident where you were in line and the mistress of the SS--

Yeah, this was-- and then they put us in a ghetto, in Chelm, when they made the ghetto. And my mother couldn't live there. There were another woman and six children and my mother and the two of us in the room in the kitchen. That's it. And she couldn't take it. She couldn't.

So we had family in a small town, not far from the city where I was born. And they wrote us that we should come there. There's not so bad. And they have plenty of room in their house to take us in. And we moved there, to Siedliszcz. And we stayed there for about a year. We moved in '41, about a year or longer.

And there, it wasn't really so bad. I had to go to work every day to dig ditches. They wanted to dry-- Poland had a lot of swamps. And they wanted to dry up the fields so they can plant more. And they were sure they're going to stay there forever.

So I used to go with my brother every day to work. And my mother would remain at home. We would hide during the day. In the evening, we would come back. And she would come out of the hiding place. And we stayed together until '42 October.

And it wasn't so bad. We worked. We went every day to work. We had enough to eat, not luxuriously, but we weren't hungry. And when my mother was home, she could wash our clothes and help us out. And we stayed there.

And there was in charge, he was a Polack, not a Ukrainian. He was the engineer of the whole project. And one day, I noticed that he had a girlfriend, which lived in our city and I knew before the war, very beautiful, nice girl. And when she saw me in town, she would say hello and ask me if I need something. And we became, not friends because who am I to be a friend to her, but just acquaintances, let's put it this way.

And then from there, from this place, they took us to Staw-NowosioÅ,ki And in Staw-NowosioÅ,k was the worst place I ever went except Sobibor. The conditions were unbearable. So one day, they told us to get our belongings. They gave us a half hour. We are going.

So we went and we walked to [? Staf ?] probably 10, 12 miles in the wind and October and the mud. And my mother said take this and take this, and maybe you'll be able to sell it, and, maybe you'll be able to buy something, food. So my brother and I, we had bundles. And I had two coats, my mother's coat, a good coat, and my coat. She said she don't need right now. She has enough one.

And we walked all the way, the 10, 12 kilometers. And when we came into Staw, I turned yellow, just yellow. And I was a young girl, 19, 18 and 1/2. And they assembled us. And they started picking out to the left and the right. Staw was also a working place. And as it came up to me, they put me with the older people.

And she was walking around there with her boyfriend, with the big German shepherd, you know. And I said, Wanda, look what they did to me. She said, come out. And I came out. And she took out the lipstick and she rubbed in my cheeks. And she says take off the babushka. I had a babushka to keep warm. And she pushed me in again in the line.

And as I went by again, they took me out with the young people. You always felt maybe with the young ones you have a better chance. So I have to say, all through the war, I was very lucky. Luck was with me from the first day on. I mean I wasn't lucky that I had to go through what I went through. But by being there, I was lucky that somehow somebody lended me over a hand to take me out of a dangerous situation. And she took me out, and I went in with the young people. And--

[BEEP]

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People like to believe in heroism. And people like to believe in humankind. What is your experience make you feel?

That the I tried the best. I wasn't a hero. There were people who were much smarter than I am and maybe more capable.

But I just was at the right place at the right time. And I took advantage. And I wouldn't say that I'm a hero. I just had made up my mind that I would get out. But I didn't organize. I just was at the right place at the right time and thought for the right people. And together we did it.

Before the escape, and other than the planning together of the escape, were you inmates supportive of one another?

Very much so. Very much so. It just because we were such a small amount of people. So we became like a family. If we knew that this one works very hard and needs maybe an extra piece of bread, a little soup, we shared. I think the relationship in Sobibor was so close and everybody tried to help the other one so much that this helped too.

And now, can you talk to me a little bit about the age group who survived primarily? I mean, who were mostly sacrificed? When you say the young and the old, how old were the old?

You see, when are so young like I was, probably 30 was old or 35. So really, to judge who was old and who were-- they were older people who were professionals in certain fields, if it was carpentry. But I couldn't say. But after the war, I would say half and half survived when I think older ones and younger ones.

I feel it was a matter of luck. You had to be lucky to survive. God had to be with you to survive. It isn't nothing that you planned or you were smarter than the next one. I don't believe in that.

Was there spiritual resistance in Sobibor?

Yes. There was a lot of spiritual resistance. And one isn't surprised. And I wasn't surprised either. When you see day by day coming transport and being killed for no reason, you start asking questions. Where is God?

But there was some who believed. And it was-- don't ask me why, I was a strong believer. Don't ask me why. It just was in me. And because I had that faith, I think it was much easier for me than for the others.

Were you able to pray?

I mean, if you prayed, you prayed only to see the Nazis dead. That was the only prayer you prayed. But everybody prayed in his own way, I suppose, deep down, not out loudly.

And there was once-- you know Yom Kippur. That's the holiest day by the Jews. And being it was shortly before the day that we set for the escape. So they made like services in one of the barracks. So the ones who didn't believe and didn't want to go in, they stood guard outside. They respected what we are doing. And they didn't go in, but they helped us.

So I feel there was a great deal of compassion in camp. There was a great deal of closeness. There was a great deal of respect for one another. And there was a great deal that we tried to help each other.

And now, can you tell me the story of how when the war first came your mother described World War I and what she thought it would be like?

You see when the war started, I mean, we didn't-- I never saw a war. I never knew what a war was. I was born after the First World War. And I talked to my mother, how does the war look? And what's going to happen to us? And so forth.

So she said in the first war-- what did my mother know? In the First World War, they were fighting near the railroad station. And they brought up the wounded to the city, she said. And everybody sat in the house. I don't know how long it took. But they used to go out. And that's what they said. And my father brought home a lot of groceries and a lot of flour and a lot of sugar and a lot of oil. He said, in case we won't be able to get, we'll have enough to eat until this thing will blow over.

But it wasn't like that. The first day when Germany declared war to Poland, they bombed our city. The Polish army was

nothing. They weren't capable to resist anything. That was a different ballgame then.

And then my father realized it's different. And my mother-- we saw the planes flying. We never saw planes flying before. In a few days, Poland was gone. And then the Russians came to us, because they had some kind of an agreement that the Russians will go to Warsaw, whatever, they had the agreement. And the Russians came.

And we had the Russian officers sleeping in our house because he was in charge of the bakery from the men who saved our life. And he came to us and he said, listen, you better pack up everything and take your children.

When they made a new agreement that the Russians go back to the River Bug and the Germans come in here, and he said, in Russia, your children can study. They can become something. And you'll be all right. The Germans are going to do to you awful things. But nobody believed it. Who believed that they'll come and kill us? They'll gas 3 and 1/2 million people only in Poland or 3 million. Nobody believed it. Nobody thought that something like this can happen. But it happened. First they came and it happened.

I mean, they were so efficient in their killings, you know. And I think they still are. First a Nazi, always Nazi. I don't believe that they are any different now. I went to so many trials in Germany. And the only thing that hurt me the most, , that nobody from those murderers said it was wrong what we did, we shouldn't have done it. Everybody followed the orders.

And I feel if somebody would come today and give them orders, they would do all over again without hesitation. And that hurts. That hurts very much. Especially when I went to the first trials and the judges were older gentlemen, older people. One Nazi defended the other. And I feel that that's why it's so important it shouldn't be forgotten. It shouldn't be forgotten, because it can happen again.

Thank you. Let's cut.

Whenever I go to--

10.

You see, we liberated ourselves because we escaped and we made the uprising. All the death camps or slave labor camps were liberated by the army, with Edward R Murrow, with all the press, and in the world knew. Sobibor, nobody knew. If I told them after the war there was a Sobibor, never heard of it, and never heard of it.

And that hurt me so much, because I thought it will just be forgotten. It'll go away if not for Richard Rashke, who found a footnote in the library when they arrested Wagner in Brazil. And he took the story, and he worked on it. And he interviewed people. And he put in his money. And he wrote the book.

The book opened the eyes that there was a Sobibor. And that was the biggest uprising in the history of the World War II. Why not tell it? And thanks to him, Sobibor came out. The story came out. The world knows what's happened. And it's written about it. And the book is translated into so many languages. And children learn in school thanks to that. Otherwise Sobibor who would have been forgotten.