

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Agi Rubin
February 25, 1992
RG-50.042*0024**

PREFACE

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AGI RUBIN

February 25, 1992

Beep.

I want you to begin by describing the deportation to the brick factory, courtyard, and I want you to give a context, your age, your town, who it was, and roughly what time it was, and how you went there, what you thought was happening.

Uh, in 1944 of April, at the time when families were without father's protections, my father in in forced labor camp already. -----women to tend their children, meaning my mother, my aunt. Uh, it came very suddenly although the atmosphere was there. I mean, the we sensed that things weren't right from the beginning of the year already. Schools were closed. Uh, life was just not what it used to be. We wore yellow stars to be singled out as Jews, and um, when the Germans occupied, this was Hungary at the time, the Germans took over the city, and in no time we were just uh told to pack a 5 kilo package, and uh they marched us, by foot, or on foot to the brick factory in our own hometown. We lived there under very meager uh circumstances uh, my aunt, I remember, improvised a, a sled for a bedroom. We had our own pillows, and slept under the sky, but we had the sled to protect us from the sides. We built our own, uh, by brick we built out of bricks, and remember my mother's concern that her child had to work so hard, and uh, we stayed there uh for four weeks, and one night, which was in April, and everything had always happened when it was dark out. We were ordered to line up. Before we knew we were in the cattle cars, taken to work or say, unknown to us, we arrived to famous Auschwitz, still didn't know where we were going. My mother's only concern on the trip to Auschwitz in the cattle car was when we had our own little corner, my mother, my aunt, my brother was 6 years old at the time, her only concern was my father's well-being, and myself, and her words were, "I hope you'll not have to be uh, you, they don't, you don't have to starve, or you don't have to be hungry ever, because I know you get headaches, my child." Seemed like she had a premonition that my father and myself would be the only survivors. As it happened, we were, but that's a later story. We arrived to Auschwitz. It was uh, the impression was unbelievable, there were these striped-clothes people, dogs, German soldiers, and it was very, very chaotic. We were ordered very quickly to get off or jump off the cattle, I was still with my mother, and lined up 5 or 6 in a line, holding on to each other, and as I said, things just happened so quickly, you didn't have a chance to think or to know what's happening to you, or what's awaiting you. Uh, my first impression was of the striped-clothed people, I said, " This must be the crazy unit." These were the workers, the Jewish workers that did the job for the Germans. After the line-up, we came up, again as I said, very quickly, came to the

selecting where Mengele was standing overpowering, very tall, looking down on us, and nodding with his finger, left and right, to live, to die. I was the only one from the row, which as I said was 5 or 6 of us, to be sent to the other side, but I ran back 3 times wanting to be with my mother. I needed her protection. I was only 14 at the time. And Mengele threw me back 3 times, he practically, practically threw me to the ground. It still didn't faze me to, to the bit?? I still ran to my mother, the third time when the gravel hit me, and my mother obviously worried about her child, said, "Go, my child, go." With a nod of her hand, and her permission to go, I did. Whatever Mengele threw me down and ordered me to go to that side, unknown to me as to my fate, and this is how I live all my life in my mother's nod of her hand, "Go, my child, go." And I went, uh...

Tell me a little more about Mengele, how did you know it was Mengele?

I didn't know at that time, but he was Mengele, he was just the overseer. He was the (cough) he was the one that decided your fate, whether you will go straight to the crematorium, I mean that was unknown to us, because we were told that uh, we will see each other. You know, and as long as you have hope, the panic is not so great because the hope is a unbelievable strength, even though it's not real, but you make it real. We didn't know where we were going, or why was I separated from my mother, that I'll never see her again. I just wanted to cling on, I just wanted to stay with her. That who Mengele was, I didn't know at the time. I only found out afterwards. So, really, Mengele was very good to me. He wanted me to live. He threw me on the other side. I was still young, and I guess I looked healthy enough to get some work out of, and the rest was history obviously.

Tell me about registration.

At the camp? Well, we were chosen, some of us, this particular transport uh, first of all were lined up uh, thrown to a barrack and we were given, we were tattooed. Not everybody. They chose us to go and work to the Breshinka or Birkenau, these were name you are familiar with. This was the place in Auschwitz next to the next to the crematorium, where people arrived, they went in and never came back again. Most of the people that were doomed to live in misery, they were given bath undresses, they were very hygienic about the whole process because you had to remove your shoes, if you still had one, were given again the striped clothes, now I knew what the crazy unit meant. Our heads were shaven completely, and when we approached each other with our -----, we didn't really, nobody recognized each other. Was...After the selection, we were selected again to this transport, which was unknown to me at the time, it was called the Zonder Commando. Zonder means special. The Zonder Commando was one group demanded to work in the

crematorium, cremating, and burning sometimes their own brothers and sisters or families, unknown to them. We were the ones, that chose, that selected the clothing that people undressed. We sorted those clothes that went back to Germany. So we had to sort the clothes. Uh, clothing, jewelry and and so on. I even found my very own clothes there, one day while I was sorting clothes. I found my aunt's coat, who went to the gas chamber with my mother, and doing it day in and day out, I still didn't believe I was gazing at the flames, the torch, which was forever burning, and I was as far as from from the crematorium, as far as I'm sitting from you practically, a few feet, and I didn't believe this. Not my mother, not my brother. I mean, I was still waiting for them to come out. In other words, I pulled down the shade, and I said, "It doesn't exist." That was my only defense of my own personal survival. I kept on pretending. (Cough). Realistically we knew after being there a year that people went in and marched in, and never, they just never came out. Uh, so your mind is really uh, uh becomes so blank at times. Maybe it's helpful or not. Our job was, as I told you, sorting clothes. Uh, sometimes outdoors, sometimes indoors. We had a, a sleeping quarters which consisted of uh, the we called it the cogoyad, it's uh, you know, step up a...a narrow piece of cot that 5 or 6 people slept. If one moved, everybody had to move. We used our cup, potato cup for a pillow, and we had one utensil, maybe a spoon.

We have to reload. Brett--

Beep.

I want you to try to give me a sort of basic picture of Auschwitz, how big it was, and then I want you to describe to me your work, and describe it to me as though you didn't already tell me about it. Explain to me how it was separate, and how different it was from other parts of the camp if you can.

As I mentioned it before, that we were chosen to be the Zonder Commando, which meant, that after every sixth Monday would change off the Zonder Commando, because we were the ones that knew too much for the world to know, and the Germans, fastidious as they were about their homework?? they knew that. We were the inside people. We knew exactly how people came and never came out of the crematorium. We were part of, of uh, of the work, the work schedule as far as we knew that those things were sent to Germany, the clothing that was being separated, the jewelry that was sewn into people's clothing. We found many times in, in a pants, where the waistband is, long uh jewel, I mean, it had no value to us. Uh, well it did because you could get a slice of bread for it, because we could you know do some business with each other. So it, it was uh worthless to us. Of course, uh the way we worked, there were two Germans always watching the barracks, that we

should work properly and fast because you couldn't stop for one minute. We, in turn, had our own watchman to see when the German was uh coming, and we, we had a password which was gashem, which means rain in Hebrew. And whenever we heard gashem, then everybody was working very diligently, and uh, otherwise in our own way, we sabotaged. If we could, we cut up everything to shreds. Not that it helped, but it was good for us. We, you know, we were not human beings anymore. We, we were stripped of our humanity, our dignity, our pride, our existence, but we had to have some kind, some sort of a strength within. This was some of our way of resistance. I know it wasn't much, but it made us feel like we're doing something. Uh, and the minute, as I said, that we heard gashem, everybody was doing the right thing in the right--that was, sort it out, put into bundles, and uh, stacked up in the barracks. So they were like mountains of it. And, once, towards the end of the week a big truck would come and take all the bundles away, and then we would get a reload of new transports coming in. Uh, I, we didn't uh this place wasn't even ready for occupants because they were just building the hotel when we arrived, so for the time being we were stationed at the Camp C, lager, uh, A lager, excuse me, not C, and we were called the White Kerchief uh transport. They gave us a white uh babushka or kerchief, how would you call it? And we marched every day, and we passed the crematorium going to Breshinka. We s--and, and not realizing what's going on inside, but it was always very solemn and we passed it, I mean nobody spoke. Nobody dared move really when we passed that area, even unknown to us as what it was for. We didn't rea, uh, maybe we didn't want to accept the reality. We didn't. I know we didn't. And after one, a month, they built up these barracks, and we were able to be housed there, and we remained there until January until the camp was disassembled. In other words, there was resistance. The Zonder Commando that I was telling you about who worked the men group, among them was a very close friend of ours from our hometown. We talked to him one morning through the wire--barbed wires. He said, "We have it too good. We are being fed well, and we sleep under uh beautiful covers, I mean why that made such a difference to him, but, still covers. This is exactly what he said. This means the end. End for us. But they're not going to gas us. And just them, a German approached, and he had to run away because we weren't allowed to talk to each other. Next morning, we were awakened by gunshots, and the whole barrack had to go out, and we were shown all the dead bodies right at the barbed wires, to show what deserters are doing. These were the deserters. The ones that refused to be cremated. So they shot them to death and then they cremated them. Among these was this friend of ours, from our hometown, who told us that he knew what their fate was, so that was the changeover. By then, there was also another conspiracy that we heard of. There was another camp in the city of Auschwitz. This was the Au--this was Birkenau. There was a city, there was another crematorium, and people had jobs. For instance, and I'm ashamed to tell you but I have to say the way it is, Sheiscommando, which was the sanitary uh group, that was transporting it from camp to camp. They had an access to visit different camps because of their so-called job.

Dignified job. And they were able to bring uh news, and the conspiracy was that this crematorium, and the one in the city, they will burn it. The inmates. They were planning on it. From then on, that crematorium stopped. I don't know how successful they were, but partly they damaged it, so they weren't able to use it anymore. Now by then the Russians and the Americans were, you know, planes were flying over us. You know what? I still don't understand up today, I remember being uh, they were taking pictures, uh, they were, the planes were so low as the ceiling. You could see the pilot out of there. And still they didn't bomb the, the area. That was already in December. End of November. They knew where the camps were. They spotted us. And we still went through from January until the, the cremation stopped at that particular in Auschwitz. We were again put through the different transports. Before we were taken to the road, which was called the famous death march, from January till April, on foot in the--

Let's back up. In your work in sorting clothes, how close were you to the crematorium. I mean, were you part of the Zonder Commando, or were you another group? And tell me how your life was and how you were treated.

We were not part of the crematorium Zonder Commando. This was another unit. The working unit of separating the clothes. Uh, we were treat, we were treated like uh, like animal inmates because of the -----, which was, which meant to be lined up every day, rain or shine, they cou--they forever counted us. We were very valuable for them. And uh, if you looked pale or weak, you were transported elsewhere, which means, meant the crematorium. They only kept the people that were able to, in their estimation, were not, we were a foursome with my girlfriend, her sister, and her mother, who I claim was my strength. To be able to aid her and get her strength gave me strength to go on. Because I felt, whatever I would have done for my mother, I could do for her. She gave up living the minute she got into camp. There was no will there. Uh, after her hair was shaven, and started growing back, it was white, and she was pitch black her hair, I remember her because she was maybe 36 years old at the time. To me she was an old lady. When, when the hair started growing it was pure white. She became a, she looked like a 75 year old, old lady, not 75 young, but 75 old, and, when we would stand in -----in this line up, we got beets for food, that was our uh delicacy at times. Well, we kept the beets just to put makeup on her face, that she should look healthy, we rubbed the uh beets on her face. And we would just try to put her in the back, that she shouldn't be too noticeable. And we carried on, and we kept her alive for as long as poss--up, up until the very last minute, which...

We have to reload.

Beep.

Can you again

(S.S.)

Tell me a good???? story of the people who ended up being shot and knew that the end was coming, and tell it to me as though you didn't tell it, tell it to me with the background of who they were, how you met them at the fence, and they tried to tell you what they thought was going to happen, and why they, why you think that. What they were planning.

Well, uh, this friend of our who was our family that uh, and a friend of the family, uh, we were in the back uh of their fence. Our backyard faced the crematorium. The, the barracks where we were sleeping, not working in but we were sleeping in. Inmates were not allowed to speak to each other. So, it was just in, in, like, in a glance. And, this friend of ours came very close to the barbed wires, and toward us in a hush, hush way, he said, "We have it too good. They are feeding us well. We sleep under beautiful covers. They are feeding us up to kill because we are next to be cremated but, we, I promise you that we are not going to be cremated. They will shot us. Next day we woke up for the sounds of the guns. They forced us out and lined us up right in front of the uh barbed wires. All the men, the whole group, was shot to death. And we had to witness their death there. With a warning that this is what deserters become. Shot to death, so in other words, if you would attempt anything heroic, we should, we should just forget about it. Uh, they knew, and they were going to die a heroic death. And in my book, in my estimation, they were the heroes of survival, the heroes of camp, where there was no way of fighting death. This was their resistance. Like in our unit, the resistance was to cut clothes to shreds, that it shouldn't get to Germany, or to, to slow it down. This was their way of defiance, without ammunition, without strength, without human physical ability, but they were resisting. That was the last time. Of course, uh, if I told you we saw them dead on the floor, and I was faced with a meeting with this doctor's son, who lives in Washington, and he dedicated his life, to the memory of his father and his friends, almost in a sickening way because uh, when I'm seeing it, it's, it became an obsession with him. What were his father's last words? And there were, there wasn't really much I could tell him. This was it what I'm telling you. But he sent me numerous tapes, I should tape it for him. I met him when we had the uh holocaust reunion in Washington. Uh, he went back to, to the camps to, to look for his father. You know, there was, he never accepted his father's disappearance or death.

Tell me how again talk about how you resisted facing what was going on and how you finally came

to realize it and accept it and how you felt.

Accept? We have no choice but to accept. Uh, it wasn't an acceptance, it was uh. Well, I accepted it, but by pulling down the shade, that was my way. It's not happening. I can't realistically say that, now that I'm looking back, whether I was hope for uh to, to be liberated, but we still talked about it. The lady that I mentioned to you who, who became so old overnight, and she was the pillar of my strength, in as much as I was for her, I felt that if, I feel that she was mine, more than I was hers because when, whenever we would, you know, while we worked we-----, "What are we going to eat when we go home? What is your favorite meal?" And we would go over everybody's fa-- but she always cooked my favorite meal, which was Chicken Paprikas, with lots of good bread in it. And up today when I make Chicken Paprikas, I don't have the heart to eat it with that, because, I mean, this is only, if I make it, I make it because of her, not because I should-----because, but I have her in mind every time when I make it, and I didn't know how to cook at the time, and she was going to make my favorite meal. These were our most important pastimes. We didn't read books. We listened to music because in at Breshinka, they had a forced a group of inmates that comprised of an entertaining committee. When the groups would arrive, we, we were awaited with uh with uh culture! There was a band of musicians that greeted us to show the mass that things are great here. Well, that was a very smart uh way of, for, for the Germans to, because people didn't go crazy immediately. They were just getting to it. So, the quorum was kept by creating, trying to create a, a calm atmosphere. So we even had that. But aside, among ourselves, uh the most important thing was survival. How far can we stretch one slice of brown bread which was like brick? How far will it go? Because we never knew if we got one next day or when we would line up for soup, if you were the very end, you prob, they probably ran out of it, which was only water. I don't know what, what was in it, but it must have been like the peel of the potato if any. Something was floating in it. I can't tell you the taste or the, but it was something like water, and you lined up and they poured in like the prisoners uh here, except it was not food. And uh, the talk about the future, or the past, what we did at home, how, how were holidays, how were the families, we fortified ourselves with nice things. And if you have nice things in the past, that does fortify you at your present misfortune or for the future because that, that foundation, nobody can take away from you, which is your inner strength. Again, what gives you inner strength is if you possess something before. If you possess the feeling prior to it, that will carry you on. In my case, it was a beautiful childhood, and I always look back to it as my virtue of my strength because I was able to have a nice childhood. I didn't look at it that this was a temporary existence, but I didn't think beyond that. Only towards the very end of the war when we were at the death march, that I had a secret feeling or a, a premonition about my father being alive because in one point as we were marching, and it's hard for me to describe to you that march, or I would have to open a different chapter to get all

together, people that hardly walking with energy-wise, we were nill??? Shoes, like oversized shoes. I wore a 37 shoe in Europe, the number it was a 42, what, if I found one, which you were wiggling back and forth, on snow-covered roads, and if you were to step aside from the road that you were supposed to line up and you know, go march, directly like uh, uh (background noise) uh, uh, anyway, if you stand out of the line, you were shot, so you had to behave yourself, you had to be strong. The way we slept, we, five people in the row, 4 held on to one. We took turns in sleeping. One slept five minutes, then we woke each other up, while walking. That was our existence, and that lasted from January until practically till end of the war. But, when I saw the German truck, and the soldier, I identified my father as a soldier because he was as I told you in the beginning, he was in forced labor camp. And I identified my father as a soldier, and my savior. And when I...

Let's reload.

Beep.

I want to go back before we go to the death march, and talk about the rebellion, or whatever you knew about the rebellion in the crematorium. That was a separate incident from your friends who were shot, right?

Uh, which?

The planned rebellion or that they were going to blow up the gas chambers or something.

Right.

Tell me whatever you know about that.

Just what I told you, that we heard through that one gentleman that they worked with the other camp that was in the city of Auschwitz, that they are going to demolish uh uh

Tell me about the man, start right at the beginning because I don't understand it. Tell me how, tell me who he came to, who he was, and exactly what he said.

Okay, the man was a friend of ours from my hometown ----- . He came to speak to us through the barbed wires. He was part of the Zonder Commando working in the crematorium, and as old

friends, we were happy to see each other, and we just changed a very short conversation, and that was his exact saying, what he said that, "We are not going to allow them to cremate us. We are working on disassembling or damaging, I should say, damaging the crematoriums, that they shouldn't be able to use it anymore." But he didn't give any details. There was no time for long conversation. All, and then he finished by saying that, inasmuch as they are so well-fed, and well-kept, and all they know that their term is up. But they are not going to die in the crematorium. They will have to shot them to death, and, which obviously uh happened. I told when we were called out to witness their death, they were laid out on the floor, I mean they weren't covered or anything. We had to see that what happens to deserters, and...

Had they succeed in doing any damage? Was there any let-up?

I couldn't tell you exactly. This is just what I heard from him. Obviously they did because the crematorium wasn't used from then on. That was the last, uh of, of the burning, last that was done there up until that point. After they were shot, there was no cremation. By then, the camp started being uh evacuated too, so obviously it was, that was the end of it. And that ----- . I don't know about other places where, how long they were able to use the crematorium, but they, that didn't uh, uh that didn't stop them from killing people in a different way by overworking them or, or uh, put them on the road uh, in a st-starvation way, I mean, just musselmans, and people just died like flies on, on the road or they were shot if they couldn't walk anymore. So the crematorium wasn't even necessary by that point. They could do their job uh very easily without it. Because the mass was gone. So here was the remnant of, of a people that used to be people. That was no more. And, and at that point they were trying to save their own lives. Uh, idiotically speaking, I was saved really by a German on the end because um, well that's, that's, that's a different thing that's already liberation, and uh how we, we, we stayed there, but towards the end of the war every German soldier or that particular unit that I know of wore civilian clothing under the uh army clothing. This was been when the bombardment started by different uh units American and Russian and so on, they would uh join the group, our group, in civilian clothes, and pretend to be one of the refugees. Uh, such was our case, because we spent about days in a forest really to starvation, I mean that was really the end, I mean we said goodbye to the world. Again the transport and the transport sti--uh still moved on, but my lady was in a coma already, she couldn't...

All right I want to go back a little bit. Tell me about the Kapo that you knew who was able to rescue her sister, but not her sister's child.

Oh. (cough). Yes, that was a very memorable night for us. This uh, she was a Kapo in our barrack. Her name was Nancy, if I remember correctly. Uh, she was, I would, I remember her as an average

overseer. You know, she was, she did her job for the Germans, keeping us intact. Uh, one day a transport came in with her father, her sister and, and her sister's child. Now they, at this point, this must have been already in June July of 1944. Maybe August. And the loads were tremendous by then. Day in and day out, the transports kept on coming faster. By then the Hungarians were coming in. Towards the end the Belgians, and the Gypsy transports. So the tra--the crematoriums were so busy that they had to have a waiting barrack until the people could go into the crematorium. That's how fast they were. And that barrack was stationed exactly across from our sleeping barracks. This Nancy, when she heard that her sister was one of them who was waiting to be taken to the crematorium, somehow she convinced one of the Germans, that she should be allowed to bring her out of there, and she did. And this woman slept in our barrack that night, and the sound, you know, I'm very sensitive to, to sounds, but, I think this is one of the reasons too. When she found out what, what fate awaited her child, she had the biggest fight argument with her sister, what did she have to save her for? To take her away, I mean she, she just wanted to kill her. She, she was grabbing her and, and just really going at, and , but the cry all night, I don't know if she really uh maintained her sanity after that. Was a horrible, horrible night, to listen to her that her sister saved her against her own will, and her child went to death, and she just couldn't endure it. This was just one of the incidents. I could tell you many incidents like this when the let's see Garnerlager, it was called the Gypsy camp, where they had people from uh, Theresienstadt. They brought, you know when they evacuate the Theresienstadt, they had children that were still live with their mothers, in There--but, when they brought, they were brought to Auschwitz, they were put in this particular uh Garner camp lager, and one night they decided to just finish off. Now these people knew already where they are going, and their sounds were intermingled with mostly singing, saying goodbye, and this is all we heard from our barracks, their sound going to death. The farewell to life. You could hear children. You could hear older people. Some recited the Shama, which is uh Hero God, or Hero Lord. It was an intermingled chaotic sound that if I live still hundred or till tomorrow, it will always haunt me, and it didn't last long. The sounds were quieted very shortly after. But every time things like this happened, gradually, we our life was becoming less and less because we had no way of, but accepting the reality that the flames are there. They are real. It's a crematorium. And that's where we come out of, the flames. I would gaze at that, I kept on think it cannot be. My mother cannot be floating in in in the flame. I mean, that's how I visualized my mother, floating in the air. And, maybe, you know, not that we were able to establish certain uh monuments in, in memory of ---, we know that this in not where we go and play, pay respects to our dead ones because they are floating in the air. They were cremated. But in our hearts, we compromise the monument, a certain little brick that has the name and this is where they are now. They go there and pray to their souls.

We have to reload.

Beep.

People don't realize uh, who in general went to the gas chamber. Now I don't know if you were there long enough to witness differences between when the transports were selected and certain types of people went, including age groups. I know you were also there when whole transports went, but can you in summary explain to me as though I never have even heard of the holocaust, what kinds of people, and including healthy people in general age groups were selected immediately for death. So explain to me about selections and...

Selection. First of all the children-----made it. No, no surviving children. They were the first one. And the mothers that had their children whether they were infants or or infants or were a little older where they held on to their mother's hand. Older people, uh, they were the first ones to be sent. Older people, mothers, and children. They young ones and the so-called healthy looking ones would remain. Ple-people with a disability were eliminated immediately. Um, uh, if they thought somebody looked crazy, if any uh, uh, uh this, anything that wasn't perfect. Um, the twins for instance were selected to live, even though they were some of them children because they used them for experimentation. For medical experiments. They were housed also in Auschwitz, in, in Birkenau. Uh, it was surrounded, you know, the crematorium, we were in the middle, and beyond us was this group of uh experimentations that they were doing. With the twins, the uh, uh lame people, I mean, lame, uh, just out of ordinary. You know, they wanted a perfect clean uh race and ,and that's what they were trying to exper--how do you accomplish that. But the group, I mean, if you're asking me about the group, whether it meant uh the quality or, or the uh whether it was by trade or by profession, that wasn't asked, I mean it was just by looks. If that was your question.

How old was old was old?

It could be uh 50, 45, somebody who was worn or my mother was 35, she was old because she held her child. My aunt didn't have a child, but she was holding on to a child, and she was 33. She was old. She was newlywed, and so you don't who was old. And, and what they ----- . Like she hadn't held on to my brother, maybe she would have survived. Maybe she would have been sent, but they didn't ask questions. There were no questions. It was up to them -----, you know just a matter of the finger. So, I really couldn't define the exact age group. I was only 14. I wasn't supposed to be here, so I don't know why, why, maybe he felt uh that particular moment that I should go. I'll never know why. So I can't really uh give you an, an answer to age groups because it was mixed.

Did you ever catch a glimpse of your reflection while you were there?

Oh yes. Through somebody else's. I would look in my girlfriends eye. The very first time we saw each other we, shaven, and we looked for each other all night because we were waiting to be housed, and I kept on calling her name, and she kept on calling my name, and we walked by each other. That was like 4 o'clock in the morning in dusk, so then she, that sounds like my name. So, very deliriously, I, I turned and, and I faced my girlfriend, and we look at each other like this, and she was like this, says, "My goodness, what you like!" I said, "Did you look at yourself?" She says, "No, I don't have a mirror." So we looked at each other. That was our reflection. I don't remember what I looked like. I, I mean, I really, I don't know, I don't remember those things. Many things I don't remember. As far as I know my feelings, that I, I see certain pictures, and I'm very strong on sounds, as far as memory goes, but please don't ask me dates or days, I, I'm not able to recall because it was just a blur at that time. Time meant nothing because you were going to in 1945, I didn't think I would be around to, to know what 1945 is, so it was really immaterial at that time. And I'm still bad at dates. To me, everything happened a couple of years ago. But the definition of it I, I couldn't tell you.

Talk to me about how supportive people were of one another, and how friendships and you had your camp mother, refer to, tell me about that whole phenomenon, adopting a new family in the camp.

Well, uh, my, I adopted my girlfriend's mother. They survived together. My girlfriend that we went to kindergarten on, we were friends, up until to today, uh her sister and her mother, I I don't, we just blended in I, the minute I stayed alone and we found each other at dusk, and we just formed a family. Just by instinct. My, from my own emotional standpoint, I felt lucky that here I had somebody to care for, and never asking whether she will care for me. I wanted to care for somebody else. And I truly am able to say that this is the only thing that gave me more strength or gave me the strength, because I had a responsibility for myself alone I had no responsibility because I was only I which meant nothing. To be alone, you are nothing. But here again, I was able to have a responsibility, and that kept me going. And, I considered her, in my own notes, well, I was very desperate, and I didn't believe in psychiatry, just my own psychiatry. I would write notes to myself. And uh, I thanked her in many ways. You know, I wanted to bring her home. I wanted her to make Chicken Paprikash for me as she promised. Unfortunately, uh, it didn't come to it because she, she died in my arms. While she was in a coma, I didn't realize. We still wanted to carry her around and I was trying to find a little wagon, where if I would be able to pull her, and because if she couldn't walk, she would be shot. But that wasn't possible and uh anyway, as I told

you, in my own notes, I refer to her, 'My lady', I couldn't call her my mother, my, I only had one mother, and that was only reserved for her. But I do call her my lady in my own notes to myself. I don't reveal her name. She might not like it. And I don't know if her family would appreciate it so, but this is my way of, of keeping her memory alive.

Were there a lot of people who formed such relationships?

Yes. Well, let me tell, there were both, you know. We are human beings. And I can't tell you that everybody was wonderful, and everybody was just hilariously funny or, or strong. They were people that uh argued. It's human nature. Some mothers and daughters argued like they do today. Uh, they were complex, even then, many of them. Unfortunately it was uh, some of it was not so nice, human behavior. I mean, people stole from each other if you know, the very first day when I arrived and they stuck this piece of rock in my hand, which I didn't know it was bread, and uh, I looked at it and I says, "My goodness, what shall I do with it? How can I throw it away? And my mother, you know, if I, if you didn't finish your food, that was a sin in Europe. A sin, bread, you don't throw away, but this was a piece of rock, what am I going to--I was afraid somebody might punish me, so I stuck it un, under my head somewhere, and of course, it was gone. Somebody had a good picnic on it, it was bread, but I didn't realize what it was at that very first day. People, yes, there was stealing going on mom from the other, mother from daughter, daughter from you know...

We have to reload.

Change film, camera roll 6 is up; Sync take 6 is up.

Beep.

Beep.

Let's go back and finish that one

(S.S.)

-----first got the piece of bread. Back up just a little bit.

Well, after being separated from my mother, and thrown into life, forlorn, alone, and very much uh disoriented, uh, we were lined up, which was very new, I mean, the shock itself didn't wear off yet. And the handed this piece of so-called bread in my hand, which to me looked like rock. And, uh,

in fear of not being punished, I hid it under my mattress. It wasn't a mattress, it was a straw something, and I, but I hid it there, and uh, next day I, I wished I could have had it, but it wasn't there. Somebody, naturally?? it was a treasure that I, that I hid, that I wanted to throw away. And that was our most precious uh thing that we could uh really have. Piece of bread. That was unknown to me. Just like, again going back to the stipe-clothed people, the crazy unit. You become the crazy unit yourself. And it happens to you.

Tell me about the contradictions that went on that you saw. Cruelty among inmates, but you also saw extreme generosity and kindness. Can you talk about that.

Well, it's human nature, and people will be people I, in my, this is my philosophy. Under normal circumstances, or horrible circumstances, you reveal your inner self in good or in, or bad, but it's easier to reveal your good self under good times than it is in bad times. I don't want to be too critical and too-----, but I feel that whoever was uh, kind or good or compassionate remained a human being there too, in spite of everything, but it was very easy that your innermost self came out of you. It was impossible not to because if you were beaten over your head with a, with a, a stepladder?? in your hand uh for a piece of bread, you didn't care who you're going to run over. You were trying to, you were selfish. You're egotistic. That's human nature. That's part of survival. What can I do for me, I? Well, it didn't exist on the -----that way. There were some people that really undressed from their humanity, and they gave in to their animal instincts. There were a lot of us that did. And some held on to this principle to hold on to your own strength and sanity. In my group, this is what existed. I was fortunate enough to be exposed to this environment in my very small circle. Uh, what went on around me, I mean, yes, I was aware of it, and I couldn't understand then either. I understand it now, what is the will of survival, but at that time, I was very critical of it because to me it meant the inner strength and your own sanity meant, your own mind meant more than anything else, and that I believe that even if you start,if that remains, you will survive.

Is that how you maintained your dignity for yourself?

I think so. I think it was my greatest asset for uh, survival, es-pecially my lady, my responsibility, and wanting to prove that I can do it, I, I, I. I will do it. And uh, that's why when, when I lost her, it was, I was just devastated, I felt guilty for not bringing her home. Just like I felt guilty for surviving and my aunt, who was a young person and had a loving husband and when I came home after liberation, and he asked me, "Where did you leave Olga?" I felt guilty because I felt like he was, he was asking me, "How come you brought yourself home, and you didn't bring my wife home?" See this conflict of guiltiness is a terrible emotional state of mind to live in, but

some of us did, and we still do. We are all scarred for life from our experiences. Some are better and some are worse, but scarred we are because even though you, some of us cannot open up to everything, and, the issue of holocaust has so many, so many different uh prospects of it to be covered. Uh, historically, socially, psychologically, so you can touch the issue from so different angles. I prefer it from humanity's sake, from one human being to the other. Uh, strength and dignity, to me that's, that's my forte. Of the people that were able to, I think that that was more ----- survival than anything else. And uh, human instinct. Just instinct. Why some, somebody asked me, said, "How did you survive?" I said, "Just by chance." It's not that I, I didn't do it. It just was, it was willed this way. It was meant for me. Whatever life is, I feel that it is written before you are born as how you're going to lead it. You are using the utensils the way you know how, but how it turns out is not up to us. Obviously 6 million plus didn't want to be killed, so that wasn't in, in anybody's plan except for, for the Germans to eliminate people, but, was it written for them? I don't know. That we should learn by their, by their uh loss? I wonder. What is it for the future generation, whether it's a good lesson or hopefully history never repeats itself, because I, I hate to think of that phase, and God forbid it should. I can't think of it that it should because we are more aware of things now, this, as we were in our days because we were incapable of, of even today to believe that things like this could be possible, but now we know that it could be possible, so we know what we have to look out for, so uh, yes, to your question, I feel that inner strength has a lot to do with your survival.

Tell me about the time that you shared your food with the twins through the fence.

Oh. I told you there was this twin that they were experimented on, and this couple that uh we went to school with my girlfriend and our brother, (cough), I had a job that I'm working at the garbage because uh that was a punishment. They caught me with something. Oh, that, now that was the incident. Yeah, I I met my friend at the barbed wire, which you know, you couldn't, if you touched it, you immediately burned. So we just talked across the wire, and, and I was able to obtain food from the packages. We were luckier than most people because we were so elite. In fact we were even called the elite group. We had it better. Even if it wasn't good, but it was better than for somebody else. I always felt that I just luckier than anybody else. We had more food because we were able to somehow, you know, we, we even found food sometimes in among the clothing, and um, anyway, whatever my possession was at the time, I threw it across to help him out. I, I think I had an extra piece of bread or whatever, and just then I turned around and the -----were there, that was the over, he was their hiring?? officer, and always very tall, I don't know if they were that tall or I was very little, but he looked so overpowering, and looked down on me, and the kapo was standing next to him, and like think, what am I going to, what shall we do with her for

punishment? And immediately I got 2 uh hits, you know, from left to right, not from the German, from the kapo, because she was going to do her job properly to show him how good she is. And he looked down at me and he laughed with that smirk, he laughed like saying, "Well, if you have the guts to do this, I guess I'm not going to give you such a radical punishment." The punishment was that I was put to work outdoors, and that was already uh fall, but the weather was very bad, uh, working outdoors in the rain and the cold, but it was good for me because I was able to cook outdoors, and I was able to take food for my lady, hot food, you know even if it was only water, but it was hot, so my punishment turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

We have to reload.

Beep.

Now I want you tell me about the death march, but I want you to start before it and how you how your unit came to be used to give blood, and how that happened and how it all started out.

I always mention the fact that everything happened at night. And everything happened fast, so before you knew what hit you, you were just part of, of the commotion. I was separated from my family. My camp family. Two of us, my girlfriend and myself, uh to give blood, and, here that was our first separation from each other. From the, from my lady and my girlfriend and her sister, and that was the most traumatic thing that could happen to us because as I told you we were each other's strength. And, I knew I had a problem on my hand, that we are, she is the daughter, I am just the pretender, she must get back somehow. Says, "You must run back and uh," you know, when you do something in the beginning you succeed, but if the last one comes that was already, uh, couldn't succeed in doing anything, but in the beginning you could. So, I was lucky enough to be able to send her back. Again, I remained all around. To me, this was like going through separation again. Uh, but I felt good about it that at least mother is with her daughter, and they are back as a family. We were taken, I don't know how much blood, as much as they could take. That was in January when the camp was being evacuated, yet they had time to organize a unit to give blood. And I think we got a cube of sugar or something after for reward for the blood. Very soon after we were lined up, I got, I did get back together with the family, and we were put on the road, marching. Everything was already, you could sense the, the uncertainty of the German army because of the planes flying so very low, but they were still saving us on the road. Our sleeping uh accomod, uh, ation was the snow, right on the ground. Our water, if we were lucky enough to drink water, it was the snow on the ground, that you were able to scrape up and only the gravel stayed. And then there were fights for that too because not everybody could get enough of it. So

what I'm trying to say, it's the thirst that can drive you crazy or insane because without water, you cannot endure. I think your mind goes before your physical ability. These were the circumstances. If there was an air raid, we welcomed it because we were able to rest, and we were hoping that whatever happens the bomb should fall, but it never fell. It just surveyed our group. They were our assistant uh, you know, assistant just like the Germans. But anyway, they did this to us from January the first stop was uh, I don't know where in, in, in like a chicken coop, straws, that was the first closed area we slept in, but that was being bombed so we had to leave. Then they took us to Ravensbrück which was the pitfall of all camps in my estimation. It was, that was already, I mean, they used that center for all the people that were evacuating certain camps, so it was just a, a place to walk by and go on. From there, we did go by train, by a cattle car, which is incidentally, uh, we were, I think in Leipzig, it must have, yeah it was Leipzig, which we found out afterwards, and was a huge air raid, and we welcomed it because that was the only time we were able to rest, and when the sirens were over, and we loaded the cattle, the cattle, the open cattle car right in next to us, burned to, burned to, to, to nothing. To ashes. And here our wagon was intact. How they figure that? I mean these were the, these were the some of them survive. Why? Uh, our wandering and wondering Jews, wondering uh ended in, in uh -----, or rather on this unknown uh maybe I do have the right, remember, the name of this forest, where my lady couldn't walk anymore, and we decided to give in, knowing that if you don't go with the group, you'll be shot to death. So, we stayed together, and the group went on, and some people kind of said, "You're crazy, come on, you can still walk, why do you stay behind?" I said, "How selfish of them can they, don't they know that this is my family and I cannot leave them?" And as the sky burned already because, you know, it was evacuation and the planes were----- in the forest, and we looked up, my girlfriend and I, we are, and I said goodbye to the world, and I apologized to my father, "Please forgive me that I cannot come home to you." So, instantly, I had a feeling that my father was, because during the walks, yeah, I forgot to mention that. I was delirious after the blood taking, obviously I became very light headed and delirious, and we walked hand in hand in the line with my family and all of the sudden I kept on standing aside, I, I left the row, I was outside, and as the gun was pointed at me by the German, somebody miraculously pulled me back into line and stuck something sweet in my mouth, and that revived me, and because I kept on running after the, the trucks. There is my father is there. He's going to save me. So I was delirious, obviously. And, they just dragged me back and we went on and on and on. And, here again, I had to say goodbye to my father and I asked for -----, but you will understand, I just cannot leave my family. And we're certain that we will all, you know, we will be just shot to death. The group comprised, we were about ten of us. One who went to pick something like a, a wood piece to be able to make a fire and cook the peel of the potato, what whatever you were able to obtain in the open forest. I mean, they were already defeated, what did they care if we ate wood or we ate potato peel. What was the

difference? But they were still keeping order by shooting somebody, so there were injured people, they couldn't walk. It was my lady who was in coma, and I begged for a little wagon. I went to the German, please, help, help me save the lady's life, just give me a little wagon so I can pull her. That, to me, meant life at that point because if I could pull her to life in the little wagon, you know what the children play with, and after that I gave up. I said, "Well, we just have to stay together." And to our greatest surprise, this uh German soldier, as I told you they were dressed in civilian clothes, he picked us, somebody picked us up from the ground because we just huddled together. He picked us up, the ten of us, they injured four of us, about 8 or 10 of us, who were completely uh, uh I mean, they, they weren't able to, to make it anymore. And they threw us in an open uh truck. And the German drove us in the civilian clothes, he removed the clothes, and we arrived to this unknown place, and they ordered us to un--we were sitting in this truck and, and very comfortably while we passed the group, and I kept on say, "See, you told me to come with you. And you told me that I was stupid. I'm not stupid, you are walking, I'm sitting." And my girlfriend's sister says to me, "She's not talking. I said, "Let her, let her be, let her sleep." And when we arrived, she, she was dead in my arms. She just, you know, uh, she was in a coma already the day before, but I didn't recognize it, I, from a medical point of view. We were ordered to take off the dead people from the dead people from the truck and leave it. I'm ashamed to tell you, when we removed my lady, she had some treasured possession in her pocket, and we, her daughter and I, we emptied it. We took whatever she had in her pocket which was a slice of bread, and potato peel, raw potato.

We have to reload.

Beep.

Why don't you just pick up there, where she died in your arms.

Well, we unloaded the truck, and we searched her pockets, and there was a possession she, a piece of dry bread, very --- slice that she must have saved from the day before, and a dry potato peel, and we removed it from her pocket. We were ordered to leave her there. And they took us somewhere else. The only way I can describe that room, it was a room that full of hay. And, no bed could be as inviting and comfortable as that room with the hay. All I remember that we all fell asleep without one word. We didn't talk about death, I don't think we cried. We were just silent. And things happened fast again. We bid her goodbye and we left, carrying the, it, somebody on the stretcher who was uh injured carried, but the German, when they unloaded us he told us, "I want you to know that I saved your life." He wore the civilian clothes. So obvious he was going to use us for his testimony as uh saving uh Jews. I don't know what happened to him. I really couldn't tell you because that was the last time I, I saw him. We weren't called to witness anything. But

waking up in that room was the most comfortable and the most wonderful thing that I can recall, up until way into the -----, then when somebody peeked in through the window and we immediately got scared because they were soldiers, but they knew that judging from their looks, they must be different, they were good soldiers. Uh, there was a group of people that uh prisoner of wars from, from 1944 that were captured on the Crete island, Americans, Yugoslavians, Belgians, English, uh mixed group, uh about 5 people volunteered to come. They were already on the no man's land because there were, only the Wehrmacht were watching them. Well, you know, you are familiar what with Wehrmacht, and what was the uh SS unit or should I go into it?

You should tell it. You should explain.

The Wehrmacht? were the soldiers that were not the volunteer soldiers, they were the, the German army unit. They were not given the responsible jobs like taking care of Jews uh because they weren't strong enough for that so, so they had more uh, softer jobs. They were the, they oversaw this particular camp, and they, like these uh, soldiers told us afterwards, that they, they had very, they were able to converse, they were prisoner of war, so they were able, through Red Cross, they were able to receive packages. They were treated uh, humanly. Not just like prisoners. Anyway, these were the men that came to see because the Germans told them that there is a group of supposedly people and they should, if they want to shelter them, it's up to them, they have permission from the Wehrmacht, to come and see what they can do for us. And they did. And, again I'll never forget that that scene that we got scared again, unknown what now? And he came in and he said, "Don't worry, everything will be all right." And they brought us food, which we were afraid to eat, because what if we don't have it tomorrow? Again. ----- survival. You don't hope, you give up, and yet you think of tomorrow. I mean, it's strange. And, they came in and they walked out. The sight of us, which we didn't realize how we looked made them, I mean they, they broke down. I mean, these were men, all high offices in the army, strong people, and they broke down crying, they couldn't handle us. The, the sight of us. (cough). So we just, just, and we were laughing. You know, you don't see yourself. But these were the our saviors. They picked us up, and they escort us, uh they escorted us into this camp, which was their camp, and as we walked in, I remembered 2 rows of soldiers, saluting and crying, as we marched into that camp. I mean, just a remnant of that. They heard but they couldn't you know, as obviously, nobody could visualize it. They were, they had the facility of listening to news, and they knew something was going on that they are finding these camps and, but we were the first one that they were able to witness. And, you know, while they cried, we giggled. We really giggled. These wonderful people took us in. They were still under the German, that I told you about, but then they escaped, and they all lived in civilian clothing. Two days later we were liberated, and um, I think it was a Russian general that

came in. These people compromised? a hospital room for us within that camp. They treated us like infants. There was no facility of, I remember there was no cow, but a Frenchman found a goat. I don't know where he found it, on this road, and every morning he would bring us goat milk. When we found out what it was, we all got sick from the goat milk. And he was so proud of it, you know that, I mean, people were so genuinely good in wanting to help. Everybody wanted to adopt us as their children. When the French people went home, come home, I have two daughters, we'll have 5 daughters. Please come with us. I mean, they just wouldn't leave us behind. Uh, this Yugoslavian person who, who was a, a great impact on my life, uh and his family remain my very best friend up until today. And, if I owe anything in my life, I owe to him for being able to regain life through his teachings, his wisdom, and foresight because he told me at that time I shouldn't go back to my hometown because that will be Russia. That was in 1944, end of April. May, because we were really liberated, May the 15th was the official, and uh, that part was really May the 12th, the unofficial.

I want to go back. When you were in the camps and along the death march, what did you do for relief? Did you ever laugh? Did anything funny ever happen?

On the march?

Or before.

Oh, during the camp, yes, we laughed a lot. My girlfriend and I, we giggled a lot. We laughed. In Ravensbrück we were, she was hit over her head while we were, they told us twelve o'clock midnight that they, we're going to get bread, and everybody was pushing and shoving and for some reason my girlfriend was ahead of me, and all that I see, she makes a motion, "Oooh." Said, "Don't worry, I'll get it in a minute too," but before I had a chance to finish, minute, the whip reached my head, and the two of us, I mean, we broke down cry, uh, not crying, laughing like hysterics. And today we meet, we go like this, and we start laughing. I mean, yes, we, we were hys, we could laugh at, at crazy things that happened to us, but when we saw somebody else that they couldn't laugh. We laughed at our own uh tragedy. We laughed when we saw each other shaven. I mean, I laughed at her, she laughed at me, because how do you look. Oh, you got this, so did I, so what. We had lau--we had laughs like this, yes. We endured life uh through laughter a lot. Or uh, we would mock somebody else, you know, like children. Like we did at home. But this is most that's outstanding in my memory is the whip, when, I, I, I guess you could barely finish your sentence. What happened is that they don't really, I'll get it, oh, me, ha, ha, just in the middle of sentence. And uh, things like this, yes. Uh, you know, laughter is a good medicine, but depends how you use

it, but you know, it is, we used it a lot. And we talked about pleasant things. In the ----- off camp, I'm not talking about the, the walk itself. That wasn't, we weren't laughing at that point because we were delirious most of the time. Uh, we were hungry, we were physically, uh not fit for, for laughter, and mostly we were thirsty.

We just ran out.

Beep.

I want you to talk a little bit about the senses. You've already mentioned some things about sounds. I want you to talk about that. But also one time, I think when you talked to Sid, you talked about smell, and you said, "We ate the smell." I want you to talk about that. I want you to talk about how everything around you affected your senses.

Well the surrounding uh, being faced with the crematorium, and the smell of, of burning. That's all we could smell. But still not realize, I mean, not wanting to realize what we were in the midst of. That was the smell. Talking about human smell. Uh, I can't describe it to you. It smelled, it smelled even guilty. You know uh how, how come I'm here. What kind animal am I that I am doing all this. I must be an animal if I do. And that was like a resignation to me to, to go on. Said, "Okay, God, you made me be an animal because if, only the animals survive uh such things, uh losing a family, smelling uh human flesh and, and, and bones, and I'm still here and I want to eat, and I want to survive. Okay, if that's what you want I'll do it." And that was my...Sounds affect me terribly. It reminds me of a crowd always. It reminds me of turmoil. It reminds me of, well, even music can, some music that would be played there, reminds me of, it's a reflection to something else. I can't hear a song, which is a, a beautifully, a beautiful song and most people uh ----- because it was sung there. To me that's a terrible sound. Bad sound. I shouldn't say terrible. The sound of the -----, that's turmoil and, and uh panic, that's what I hear in sounds, and music takes me back to, again another phase of you know the, the deception as we already we see in camp with the musicians who were the inmates. The dying sounds, you know, people that couldn't go on anymore. The, the sights I only visualize up here but not as clearly as sounds. They, they, they are my weakness, more so than, than certain, and some visuals that only I can see, just like when I laugh in a joke, you don't know, you might, might not hit you funny bone, but it hits mine. Uh, another picture, this, this is about what I would describe it as...

What about religious resistance? What about songs of prayer? Did you hear that?

Yes. The, the people again that uh, because that was my most, the closest that I was to a group who was taken to the crematorium, those, the groups that were taken in, we saw them from a distance, but they never came out, but these people marched through our gates, I mean, they were very close to us. And they sang uh, the Shimah? the hero God, that was their last word. Anim Amin?? I believe. Those were their last words as they marched to their death. Anim Amin, I believe. And yet these people knew where they were going, and they went with a free, they went with a rinsed soul. I mean it's, it's, that's how it sounded to me. I'm not talking about the children, I'm not talking about the screams, but this overrode, Anim Amin, I need, I believe overrode the other sounds. Am I being clear? Uh, that was the most effective sound to me that I experienced, when they, they took that group in. And your other question? I forget now.

I was asking you about senses. Lice, you loathed lice. What are lice? Tell me how they affected everyone.

They hurt, they are dirty, they are filthy. I don't know who is, when we arrived to uh, after, to Mahom, Mahom was the, it was uh, uh filthy. I mean, we saw they shot a horse, and they were going to uh feed it to us, and I almost couldn't eat it, yet there was absolutely nothing edible. The, the straw sacks were on the floor, not on a rack, you know, not like a bunk. I mean our sleeping space was the floor, a cement floor, must have been, I don't know what it was before that, and, I don't know, if you ever saw it, I'm sure you did, these Chinese people, oriental people, I saw a film on that, they are, the older are put in a waiting room where they are doomed to die. They know when they get old, they put them aside, and this is their waiting place for death. This is what this was. A place to be in between. And we were full of lice. Lice, you know, uh can drive you crazy because you can't just dismiss it like this but they, they stick to your flesh and they itch, and, and they drive you crazy. We were so fortunate somebody gave us clean clothes and we unshed? everything, and the minute we sat down, we were full of it again. And, and I had a funny sight, even to that, because I remember one of my friends was very particular and she would, she kept on killing them, you know, one by one, I says, for everything, there were dozens of it. But she was very immaculate about it. So she would go like this and like it hit here and killed here. It was horrendous. The thought of it, I can't, you know, I'm not a killer, but I hate flies, and the minute a fly attacks this house, I'm running. My family laughs at me. Uh, mother got her instinct again. She's running. I said, "I don't like flies. I don't like insects." But, that's it. Uh, that was the pitfall of everything. Of human existence. That was not existence in my book. Who talks about dignity, I mean, your dignity is way gone, I mean they, it was very taken care of. At that point, you just wanted to survive, which whatever way humanly or, or, or animal-wise, just to beat it, beat death. This was our last straw. I mean, I really don't think that, if I had to, I couldn't have endured

anymore of that uh, the lice business, that that would have finished me off completely. Luckily, it, it, the duration of our stay was too short there. But it was long enough to really, leave a, a very lasting uh feeling in me.

Tell me what a kapo is. Pretend that I don't have any idea what a kapo is, and you're describing it and tell me if there are good kapos and bad kapos.

Well, there are good people and bad people. The kapos were selected by the Germans to uh, to oversee that the orders were followed. The kapos were our overseers. In other words, when they were our alarm clock, sometimes with a whip. 4 o'clock in the morning, or twelve o'clock at night depending on what shift you worked in. Get up! Get going! Or they were the ones that called you to uh ----- to, to be accounted for. They were the ones that uh, oversaw order. They saw the order. Now, you know I mentioned that before, maybe not today, there were some Germans. Uh, you know, uh I was asked the question many times that they did their duty, because they had to do it, so I, I use the same phrase. The kapos did their duty. Some did their duty and some did it with pleasure. The Germans, per se, if they did their duty, but you could tell even there, or I somehow sensed it, he said, "Look, I have to do it," or "I enjoy doing it." And this was uh present at the kapos also. Some people don't know how to handle uh power. Well, that was power--being in charge of others. Uh, (small cough) they don't know what humility is. And that showed in the kapos as much as it showed in the German armies. Not in such a perso, not, I'm not speaking percentage wise, just in comparison.

We have to reload.

Beep.

I want you to do, I want you to define Kapo for me again, but this time I want you to make it clear that kapos could have also been Jews. Just pretend you didn't do it before. Just do it as though we haven't done it. What is a kapo?

Okay. A Kapo was chosen, the Jewish inmate was chosen by the Germans to be the police force actually. The overseer of their fellow, uh fellow uh inmates, prisoners. They were the ones that gave orders through the Germans. Some of them enjoyed their work more than others. Some really took the liberty of even hitting you if you weren't as fast as they wanted you to be. And some would seem nice, say "Please line up now." But most of it was again, like it was their duty, or their job uh to, to send us for the, to be accounted for the ----- . To keep your barracks

immaculately clean, or just for anything. Just to be reprimanded for talking to somebody, if you weren't allowed to speak at that particular time of the day. Or uh, to go to work. They would uh, give the bell? rise and shine, not in a very pleasant way. Uh, these were their, I would say, their general duties, to oversee, to carry out, their demands to the prisoners.

Could kapos also participate in rescuing? Could they help people?

Yes, in their own way. I told you the story that Kapo rescued her own sister. They could, I mean if they had the opportunity, and some, some knew. Some were better than others. Some enjoyed their authority, I, I, I was beaten once by a kapo, and she enjoyed it because she was going to show to the ger-german overseer that how won, how capable she is. And you know that that particular kapo, I swear that I saw after the war, and I followed her for days, and I lost her, but I heard she was alive and she was being prosecuted. Lots of them were. But as years went by, you know people forget or they, or they accept. They have to do it because of this. Now this where I differ with the general public that I don't forgive people that were mean there. To me, they remained whatever they stand for today. They could be in politics, they could be the President of the United States, God forbid. Or any professional person that you know had a past and you don't know about it, and to me there's no excuse. Whether it's Jewish or any, or not Jewish.

Talk about how Germans used Jews in various capacities to do things they didn't want to do.

In the workload, are you?

Yeah.

Well, they didn't do any day just work, I mean from, uh, they, they did factory work, they did work out outdoors, they uh gathered the uh dead bodies to be cremated. They were in charge of it, but they didn't do the, they were there to push the button, to tell you to push the gas. They didn't do any physical work if that's what you're asking. They, they were their servants, were there, they were toying with us to their, to their delight if uh, uh I'm just going to use an example, I was being punished one, and the punishment was that I had to kneel on the stone overnight and the German would walk around me, they smiled on me all night long, and I had to stand erect, and, and it was raining because uh, I was, I was a daredevil, I mean, I wasn't afraid because I had nothing to you know, I didn't have second thoughts about it, I was stupid. And uh, I ran out somewhere where I wasn't supposed to be. It was forbidden or, or blocksperer, blocksperer it was that time. Then I was out anyhow, and, and that was my punishment. They took pride in and delight in, in people's

suffering, and this I'll never forgive them for. Uh, you know, we lived, and we are asked the question, this is a new generation, and by all means, a child cannot be responsible for a father's deeds. But who is that child going to believe? My story or his father's story? Why are we here talking about the holocaust? What we want to forget about. We wouldn't, this wasn't a conversation for us in the, for many, many years, until we were to realize that if we don't speak about it, some of the, the remnants of the holocaust, who will. And then the story started coming out that this is a hoax. Now how can we allow this to happen? We put our personal feelings aside, uh, whatever it may cause, and it's not easy, but that's the least what we can do for the sake of our loved ones. I feel that this is really the least that we should keep their memory alive. And to talk about it as history because you know very, very, in the very right after the, in the fifties, even in the early fifties, in the dictionary, the Second World War, what happened. Period. If I wanted to look up the Second World War, I had to read the you know, the my account.

You wrote a line soon after the war, and this is what you wrote: "I feel like a dead degraded cowardly Jew." Do you remember that line?

Yes.

Can you tell me about that.

I felt defeated. Very defeated. I (cough) with all the losses, and not what the people ----, I felt very hollow. That's the only way I can describe it. Hollow inside, and I felt if I didn't let it out in some way, I would burst. I was hollow I was angry, I was angry at God. If you are a God, how do you allow this to happen. The same breath while I argued with God, I asked for forgiveness, in the same breath. But I was angry. I was angry because this, this was my realization of what happened. Up until then, I lived and I walked around with a shadow, pulled down. Pulled down the shadow, I'll cry tomorrow. But this prevailed?? Reality was there. People were dead. I had to start a new life. I didn't know if I liked it. Things didn't happen the way I would have wanted my life to go, and it was a terribly hollow empty feeling.

People talk about heroism in connection with survival. How do you feel about that?

Heroism? I don't see it as such, really, I mean were some people that were heroes yes. Uh, I feel this was a individual uh, survival trade. Whether that's heroism, I don't know, I, I don't think so, I don't. There were some heroes. To me a hero is who salvages the world, or salvages the situation or saves a human life. That's a hero. Well, although it's said that to save your own self, you, you

are a human being too so what's the difference? Who, who, who are you save, if you save yourself you're a human being, and I tend to tell people, I say, "I haven't got time to do such and such for myself." I says, "Pretend you are somebody else and you are doing it for somebody else. Then you'll do it, because for yourself, you don't do things." So by saving yourself, in my estimation, it's not heroism, it's just an instinct, but going out of your way and doing a heroic thing by jeopardizing yourself, uh, that's my definition of heroism. That we are all heroes, I think we are just lucky survivors, to the extent that we are here. It took many years and many, many roads to come to the point where we say that we are lucky survivors because from my personal exam, I didn't call myself lucky. You know, when you live with a guilt complex, why me? I still question, when I said that I was hollow, I still didn't feel like I was a deserving human creature. How come I endured it, the unendurable. That was my theme of, of acceptance. But then, as years go on, and you have so many responsibilities, you forget about your own, own egotism, and I mean, we are all egotistic in, in, in many ways, but again, when you come to the point that you are responsible, you -----forced to go on. So, it's not diminishing the past, but it's not as vivid because you have other things too, there are human beings to deal with, and you have responsibilities, and our responsibility is and we realize, most of us realize that that we do have to talk about it because we are the last of the Mohicans. It has to be a testimony. Whoever it, whoever will benefit by it, as long as humanity benefits by it. Uh, I don't even know if my own children will benefit by it. My, our own children are very, very sensitive about talking their parents' past. It's not that they are turned off, they cannot face up to it. They can I-they I don't know if they can't or they don't want to identify you as a parent, as that creature, and I can underst-I can sympathize with that and understand it very well because I despise the word of survivor. I don't like that word, and I asked -----many times, what other form of word is there than survival or but I guess there is no other, so I answer to the same thing. I couldn't see them, they talked about musselmen. You know, when you see a group, and I'm sure you sure you saw these documentaries how the dead people are shot and, and, and the people became these, just uh (cough) the outline of human being, just the bones sticking out. I resented that picture. That' not my people. That's not my family. Why don't you show the picture where they were people before they came to this point. What made them come to this point. Or they should, our generation, the generation that was gone, this is how the world should picture them. They were always like that. They were individuals with hearts and souls and feelings and looks and this wasn't shown, and I feel the connection is there the same way without you know the survivors' children, some, some are able to talk about it. They don't want to identify you with that. That's to them horror and that happened to their loved one. That's my definition of that.

Okay, thank you.

Sure.

I want to do room tone, and then I want to look at the album and record a little bit more.

30 seconds of room tone for interview with Agi Rubin.

Thank you.

Okay

End of Room tone.

Holocaust; 7-1/2 IPS; 60 cycle sync; 2/25/92; Detroit, Michigan; Camera Roll 11 is up; Sync take 11 is up; Continuing interview with Agi Rubin. Not the interview but rather talking about photos that we'll be shooting.

Beep.

This is a picture of my family taken in 1938. Uh, my father's side of the family, my aunt's uh wedding. These are my par--my mother and father, myself, and my father's brothers and sisters. From the whole picture that is still here to talk about the wedding is my cousin in NY, my uncle in CA, and myself. Nobody else was able to tell the story, stories of the holocaust from this picture. These are my parents, their engagement picture which must have been in 1926 or 27. My father is the soldier.

Let's go back and pause for just a minute and just wait for a second...Okay.

I was very lucky to be able to find this only album that I had from my past. This is again my parents' uh wedding. My mother's parents, my grandparents, and the others that are grandparents on my father's side, their wedding picture, the outcome of the wedding, number 1 and number 2, my brother. Family picture, this is 1942 Warsaw, my parents, my brother, at this age of 6 he was cremated. Myself as an athlete, that one too. A playmate.

How old are you here?

I must be about 9. My maybe grand-----my great grandmother, whom I don't remember. My mother and her sister, who, they went together, they were cremated the same time because they stood in the same line. I'm in the middle of them. I was very close to my aunt as my mother was very close, they were very, very close friends. This is my aunt from my father's sister and an from my mother's sister and their children.

Okay.

But this picture, I'm told, this is my only surviving aunt, who wasn't in concentration camp, but she was uh imprisoned in Budapest, and that's how she was able to survive, but these are her children that uh perished. Her husband is no longer, and this is a tale that we are told about her winning a beauty pageant uh contest. And that was, this is my father and my mother. I think this is one of the last pictures that was taken before the deportation. Must have been in 1942, the latest or 1943. But this was about uh, that's was about me when I was taken to camp. A year or two later. An uncle and an aunt. Children in the ----- . My aunt Emily, my most favorite cousin, who was shot right at the time of liberation, and her sister who lives in New York.

Okay.

These are all, how shall I say, goners, nobody exists, these were, when I was telling you that people were not only musselmens, this was, they had a life, they had a future at that time, and this is what was before. This is an uncle, my aunt at her wedding, and my cousin's graduation picture, I think it was high school, and this I call the girls because, my mother and her friends. And that's my treasure from the past. Unfortunately I don't have too many more left, but I hold on to it for dear life.

Is it okay to turn the page?

The perished children, was nobody on this page exists except for myself, which is uh here and here. None of the other. These were all cousins, brother and cousin and cousin, from other cities, I mean neighboring cities that they lived in. This was -----.

Okay.

Well, these were already after the war pictures. I don't think I will go into those.

Tell me where you were?? after the war, right after the war.

Oh, this was my first professional picture after the war. This one was taken in 1946 or end of 45 in Czechoslovakia.

Tell me about the little picture, on the right.

Oh that was the outings we used to have of around the city, and around ----- where I lived after the war, and we did lot of outings by foot, and must have been one of those excursion trips, which, you know, those are the same. See how we're living. This is where I lived after the war at my aunt's place.

Let's go back to this page. Are others on these...

Mmm. I guess, no, I guess, somebody, they put it out. These are friends. Old friends from those times. Somebody must have snatched this from here, I don't know.

Do we need room tone from this place?

Room tone.

Okay.