

I mean the transport to Birkenau.

We were taken out of the ghettos, or actually, of the particular ghetto we were in, and herded in groups of about 500, 600. And were told not to take more than just little hand bundle. The Hungarian gendarmerie, a kind of martial or sheriff, but primitive characters, were driving us to the railroad station.

And when we arrived there, we were pushed up on railroad cars, actually cattle cars. But the amazing thing about I still remember is that on the way, being driven, or herded by the Hungarian gendarmes, we were singing songs of hope. And I do not remember exactly how to translate the song, but I know which part of this Psalms it is in.

And we thought that we are already enough in it. We were about 50 people or 60. 20 more, 30 more. So we must have been in a little cattle car, which is about a third of the size of an American railroad car. About 120, 140.

And before we knew, whoever didn't make it up with the family in the same car was cut off, and they just slammed the doors. And those who were outside, they still had to put barbed wire on the little bit of opening, which was on the outside, on the top of the railroad car. And these cars were usually used for cattle transports or for grain.

In the car, the situation got by the minute worse and worse. People were looking to find a spot for the elder people to sit down. There was no space to sit down. Because if you sat down, you couldn't get up. Because we were herded in, stretched like sardine bars.

The journey actually lasted-- Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday-- three nights and about three days. If anybody had something to eat-- because in the ghettos, we already used up most of the stuff. But we have been successful taking out of our homes when we were taken out into the ghetto.

Had to share it with others. But then we realized that this is not a simple journey of just a few hours. People were holding back or couldn't just generously pass it out to others.

Then suddenly, we start seeing that people are taking care of their needs in the cars. And the stench got worse every minute. And they were-- the people who converted to Christianity with the hope that they will be spared because the church has encouraged them, said, look, if you give us your belongings-- these were still in the good days-- you will get free pass. You'll become a Christian.

But when it came to that, even they were driven onto the cars. They were the first suicides. So we had death in the car, sickness in the car, heart attacks. People who were taking medication couldn't take it. It was just undescrivable.

As a matter of fact, I can't recapture the moments of it myself. Because if I do, I go just crazy. I mean, you see their own family languishing in bowel movements and these kind of things. It was a terrible scene.

Or people who wanted to say their prayers started to say it, and others say, you cannot do that in a place which is unclean. It's against the law. It's better if you don't say it. There were very, very tough moments.

I mean, matter of fact, we didn't want to resignate to despair. And whoever trying to look out when we went through stations, through that little bit of opening, couldn't even decipher where we are and what's going on. And those were-- which we called them on the watchout.

But we still cared or ventured to get up. Because you had to stand on the shoulders of others. Said, you know, we see a lot of people. And they know that we are going by here. They will notify the authorities. It was just a dream. Or others said, they are just laughing.

And there was no water. Even if you stop somewhere, nobody could move out because the cars were pretty-- they're locked. There was no chance whatsoever.

Until we arrived to Birkenau. And that in itself is a story that I hope people know by now. They opened up the-- we arrived. What we really realized at that point when we arrived in Birkenau, which was very early in the morning, and we were standing there much longer than we were standing on other stations. And we smelled the stench of the burning flesh and bones.

The amazing thing is that we were not allowed to have radios. Jews were not allowed to have radios. In those days, a radio was not something that you go into the store and buy it. You had to buy it from a licensed location, register it, because you have to pay a yearly fee to the government.

So everybody who had a radio-- was just like having a car. Both registered. And then you were to come for it. So we had to give the radios back. No Jew was allowed to keep a radio.

But we had one hidden in the deep basement. I did not even know about it because I was too young to [INAUDIBLE] do that. We were always afraid if something or somebody's discovered. The older people or the older members of the family can withstand the torture of the authorities. But the youngest were not trusted in that.

But when we come there, though, me older brother says, this must be Auschwitz or Birkenau, what we heard on radio. They would go down to the basement, cover themselves up with blankets, and listen to the foreign news. Nobody was allowed to listen, not even the Gentiles.

And I guess it was so gruesome to want to believe that it is possible that they are having crematoriums and burning people. So then my brothers, one of them says to the other, this is it, what we heard on the radio. And this was really the first time that one came face to face with reality.

So tell me what happened when you came out of the cars.

The doors were suddenly opened. These were fairly wide doors. And so people literally fell out on both sides. And the Germans came with their dogs and said [GERMAN], means out, out, out. So whoever could get out got out immediately. And there were some that were dead or couldn't move, so we had to take them out.

And we were told the bundles to be put on one side and line up on the other side. So everybody had to give up whatever little belongings he had, which was really very meager.

But it meant survival that we would have what was the specialty in those days, redried bread. So it was bread that it was dried two or three times so that it has long shelf life. And some people had their prayer books. This was one of the most important treasures. Or the Tefillin, the phylacteries.

And so we had to go through a row that everybody gave everything up and went to another line. There, we were standing in line and we saw the chimneys and the really flames going out. And that the very thick smoke, dust landing on us and on the grounds. And we were there lined up and had to go through a gate.

In that gate, there was a few very high-ranking officers. We assume that they are high ranking because they were differently dressed than the other soldiers, which we saw some had the SS mark. That figure was already known to us by the occupation of the Germans. And others had the [GERMAN], which means the dead head. Dead head marks.

And they ordered us to go to the gate. And at the gate they're standing at, these high-ranking officers with white gloves, shiny boots, and with a baton, right and left. So the one on the left-- I think that the left meant that they went to death and the right went to work. When we--

We're just running out. Let's just stop and put another log on.

OK. Did you hear them?

Changing, changing film. Camera roll two is up, sync take two is up.

I want you to continue and talk about-- although you and your brothers might have known where you were, did people know where they were? Did they know what was happening?

No, they had no idea. I don't think so that they knew. Maybe some others knew also a little bit. But overall, I don't think that anybody knew what was going on. There was some talk that the resettlement for work was just taking out of our homes going into other areas to do hard labor. But nobody really knew until that point that there was going to be killing people. Nobody had any idea of that.

Matter of fact, when somebody said that in line, while waiting to be sorted out, said, don't talk ridiculous things. Look, this nice shower. There was one building which had indicated that it's a shower room and so on.

But almost immediately, we realized that situation is different. Because while we were standing in line, we already saw from evidence of the previous arrival. Those who were assigned to work, naked women, standing in line. And another group on the other side, naked men. It was, at that point, extremely demoralizing. And we knew that this is not something which is normal.

And they were not-- the ones who we saw naked were not older people, but they were all the ones who were going to go to work if not to be gassed. It was very-- every second was a different thought. Everybody thought it was something else. And everybody wanted to believe it is something different.

So that we really did not know. We had no idea that they did this. Really possible. It's a difficult task. I mean, bitter pill to swallow to think that if a certain theory is correct, then those who went on the other side, your parents and younger brothers and sisters are going to be killed.

So we really didn't want to realize, even if it was a fact that we knew that there's nothing to do. We're surrounded here by Gestapo and SS. This is going to happen. So we had no idea.

Even that what my brothers knew or somebody else who knew that didn't seem to be real that it could happen. So I really don't think so that we knew anything.

And so tell me what happened then about registration.

Yeah, I mean that time, was no registration yet. What it was is that the smaller part of the people who were taken to labor were taken into processing. The processing meant had to give up all our clothes. And the Kanada commander which was handling the-- call it processing or receiving of those to go to work had to take apart their clothes to see whether there is no valuables in it.

And some people were even kept for a day or two there that they should have their bowel movements. Because they must have found before in the people have swallowed some valuables, some rings.

They told the story that there came one group, I think they were Dutch people, and they had rolled very thin dollars. Because the dollar was almighty. But, and they swallowed it. They put an into a condom and swallowed it. Though they have done that as well.

The shower rooms, what we have experienced, which some of them thought that is actually to be either to be scalded with hot water, to be burned, or damaged the skin. It was really showers. Went to disinfecting station. Then we came out on the other side. We were given a camp uniform, which was kind of a pajama, really. Blue and white stripes or gray stripes and blue stripes.

And from there, we were-- and everything was in driving, [GERMAN]. This was a demoralizing process. And I think that we were demoralized by the second. I mean, you moved where that was. And then we were driven into barracks. We came into barracks, we couldn't believe it. Which had three shelves for sleeping facilities.

And it took-- I think we arrived early in the morning. Until late, late afternoon, they gave us a semblance of what was called a soup. And people refused. First of all, it tasted terrible. The pots and pans what they served it in, the cups which were-- the cups which taken from the people who arrived, this was our cup which we had to hold onto to get our food in the future. Smelled very bad.

And many people didn't want to eat because it was not kosher. They refused to eat. So until after a day or two, there were some learned rabbis in the group. They said, listen, don't let's do the job, help the job of the murderers. We must eat. And actually, it's a commandment to survive. If you're going to do everything possible to survive. We will outlive them. And this is how was hope was built in us.

And these people have given us tremendous hope. Because I was a kid. And there are many others who were younger than me. And so we defied them already. We were given beatings. Instead of caving in, we showed that we do not cave in. We are not that easy prey.

And we were in those barracks for a few days. And then we were taken to Auschwitz. I don't know how many miles it was a walk. But I do remember the day we were taken out of barracks to be walked to Auschwitz, it was the strongest pour I've ever experienced. Not even an Indian during monsoon was such a pour. We were drenched in water and waiting.

We did not know what's going to happen. Then we were taken, or driven, to Auschwitz with hound dogs. And it was a sport to get us every so often to run, almost to the point of exhaustion.

We finally arrived in Auschwitz. And there was a registration, really. This was the first time they were-- we were registered. And we were tattooed. Like I have my tattoo on my left arm.

And there was a-- the registration consisted of a rather small card of 3 by 5 or maybe 4 by 6. They wrote down-- you had to give your family name, your surname, father's name, mother's name, where you come from, what are your professions, what can you do, what are you capable of doing. This was for the purpose so that they can clean the people for the various jobs.

And we were there for a couple, three days. And there, we were indoctrinated every minute. If only one of us will dare to do this or dare to do that, we will be put to death. And not only the person who is going to be found to be guilty, but the whole crowd, the whole barrack, the whole group.

And then we were warned constantly to know that nothing will be tolerated here. That with one machine gun, they can wipe out all of us, or we can be always taken back to Birkenau, where they're going to burn us. By that time, there was no secret anymore that those who were taken on the other side were to be gassed.

So this was actually kind of an indoctrination to submission. And we have all encouraged each other not to give up. Even if you take it to work. To where we were always plotting, how are we going to-- can we sabotage them? What can we do?

Let's just wait for a minute because this noise, I think, is too much. Some you can take out.

OK. You were talking about sabotaging and plotting all the time.

And this was our preoccupation at that point. How are we going to do that? What can we do? Because they told us, the Germans, that escape, no chance. Because we're in hostile territory with all the Pollacks, and they hate the Jews.

There's no chance for a Jew ever to survive even if he should be able-- if he has a dream to get out. The Poles out there, they're bloodthirsty for Jews, for Jewish blood. And the Poles are not going to let us ever survive. So this was clear to us.

And then we got confirmed that this Brzezinka, Birkenau, which was known Brzezinka in Auschwitz, which in German

was Auschwitz, but in Polish was Oswiecim. And we realized that we were really in enemy territory. Therefore, our chances to survive there would be none.

So we figured, how else can we do that? Of course, we had dreams that the American reconnaissance is going to bomb the railroad tracks, they'll bomb the crematoria. Dreams we had. We had great dreams and great hopes.

And we had, really, in the camps people who-- they literally sacrificed their life to send words of encouragement or to sneak in into other groups to tell us not to despair. Then we were singing songs of hope. The kind of songs we sang when we were taken to the railroad cars.

OK. We have to reload. OK. Why don't we pick up, starting with singing songs of hope. And then can you tell me how you and your brothers supported each other in the time you were together?

In Birkenau and Auschwitz, we were four of us together. And in Auschwitz, we were divided. One of my brothers was taken to a different working commando. Also, we made every effort to stick together, but it was not possible. And another brother still remained in Auschwitz.

And I went with my other brother to Jaworzno, to a coal mine. And that coal mine had also big construction of a power-generating station. Supposedly, the highest chimney in all of Eastern Europe. And they had various commandos in the various coal mines, and the chimney building, and railroad construction.

And there was all the commandos who were still enlarging the camp. Because the camp was a small camp to the house about 500, 600 forced laborers, which we were called forced laborers. And at that point, we were 7,800.

So the question was here, everybody was assigned some kind of underground duty within us to see whether it's possible to have a tunnel to go.

But then others said, don't waste energy on that because we know that we will end up just in a Polish village. And chance to survive is zero. Another thought maybe we should do something that the coal mine caves in and therefore, they will realize that they cannot continue because they have a refreshed group of people who will sabotage them.

Other thought that we should do something with the chimney, with the power-generating plant. We had all great ideas. And on a smaller scale, we did. Because some people really risked their lives to defy them.

I mean, I have one experience, which actually gave me a chance to survive. I was working in a coal mine I was kind of a gopher. How did I become a gopher? The German civilian population who were working in the camps, they were not really German from the motherland, but they were what they called false German. They were second, third-grade Germans but lived in Poland for a long time.

They were the so-called engineers and foremen. But some of these guys could not read the paper. So he took a cutting of a paper and he let me interpret to him what it meant. Because they were also terrorized. They could not talk to each other politically what's happening.

And this same guy who I worked for, we would get everyone's another shirt. If the shirt was good, he was suppose to give a half a loaf of bread and give an old shirt. Because even the good shirt what we got tattered up in a matter of days.

So I was kind of his gopher boy. He would send me for equipment this and that. These coal mines were exhausted mines. But with cheap labor and war effort going on, they needed to exhaust-- to explore every bit of coal they could.

I don't know, I heard this that it goes by BTU heat unit for so much. But the further the mining is-- because it is wet somewhat, it has less BTU units. And whenever we would have to use-- I don't know if people know what coal mines are. They are several yards underground. And it is just dynamited out a certain artery. And then it's built out, put in railroads to get out the coal.

And if you hit in a very bad artery, you have to go much deeper to get the dynamite into there to get more of the coal coming out. I don't really know the mechanics of it very well. But it meant that we had to drill very deep to put in the dynamite this deep.

The coal did not come out in the same extent as the good coal. And then really, we would have literally to crawl on our bellies and drag out with our fingers and nails the coal.

And very often, while pulling it out, it would cave in and would bury 20, 30, 40 people. Just recently, I read in the papers that it happened in Turkey. And I have a very good idea of what it means.

So when I was sent to get the longest drill, which meant this is going to be one of the hardest jobs we will face, the others did not even know. Maybe one or two of the fellows knew that I'm sent back for the long drill.

The coal mine is like a little city. Has streets here and street there. And here, they have a little storeroom for supplies. And here, there is the repair shop for the lorries. And when I went to get the drill, I realized that I'm going to endanger many people's lives. Because if it doesn't cave out too high, we have to do it on our bellies.

And many could be-- I decided at that point to break the drill. How do I break the drill and to save my life, too? I was not really willing to die unnecessarily if I don't have to. Figured I have the excuses that I tripped in the railroad tracks. Because there was always water. The water was not pumped out like in a normal coal mine. Every coal mine has water.

And I broke the drill. Of course, this is considered sabotage. Even if it would have been an innocent matter. Everything that it was not pleasing was sabotage. Sabotage was the ultimate thing is to kill the person.

But to my good fortune, the man who would have the support to do the killing has left. He was a very high-ranking officer. He left. It was already 11:00 or 12:00. And he left, I think, at 9 o'clock. Because we were working a shift from 2:00 in the afternoon until 2:00 in the morning. So my number was taken. And tomorrow will be my day of reckoning.

Of course, I had advice from others how to go about it, what to do. And I was fortunate to get myself into the infirmary. Well, there was certain process how you got in and what kind of sickness you simulated that it shouldn't be considered a sickness that you can not get cured within two days.

And actually, I was taken out of that infirmary by Mengele, who came into the infirmary. Certain people, he called by numbers. They were destined for death. And some of them, he just said, whoever wants to go for recuperation. Outside was a big covered truck, with about 50, 60, or 70 dead bodies, and about 20 very sick people, and a few saboteurs like myself, criminals.

And we went our way to be cremated, to gassed and cremated in Birkenau. And if there is hope and there is faith, that were the litmus test for us. There was one man-- it was Saturday afternoon. And Saturday afternoon is the seudah shlishit, the third symbolic meal. For that symbolic meal, one has to wash hands, evoke a prayer over bread.

He said, it's time to say the prayers for sitting down to the third meal. And he started singing. We were singing. The four or six Germans in the cab in front with the machine guns thought, the Jews are crazy. Here, they're going to be burned in another hour, and here, they're singing.

We arrived to Birkenau. And we were not processed like we knew it from before that you go to so-called shower room, which meant the gas chambers and then the crematoria. But we were taken in in the same process like when we arrived to be processed for work.

And there is always a German doctor with white gloves and shiny boots, very proper uniform. Alongside him is the Jewish camp doctor. Because if something had to be checked, well, the German doctor would never touch the prisoner. But the Jewish doctor would do that.

And the Jewish doctor-- this was the only time when the little card system was transferred from one came to another.

German order had to rule. It was not just without any method.

Of course, they did that so that they should not-- they should be able to keep count on people so that nobody can escape. They were very much frightened that if somebody will escape. I mean, I don't know even if they would have escaped. The only ones who ever escaped there were Poles.

Wait. We have to reload.