

Let's go back a little bit. And maybe you can tell me about-- you told about a transport in your other interview of strong men who came like ghosts and you tried to help them.

Oh, yeah. There was a rumor in that camp that they need so and so many men in another camp for work. Whoever wants to go can go. So, they loaded up several boxcars full of people. And I don't think it was more than four weeks when they came back. And they were-- when they left they were like Hercules, you know. Hercules. They came back and I looked at these guys. They came in row of eight. And they were they looked like skeletons too. And they couldn't walk. They were just swaying like this, came against us.

And when they were close enough to us, they fell on their knees begging for food and water. I had to give them water, you know. And then they-- they got in their barracks. And I think half of them didn't make it up again, you know, to live through. And we had to go onto the railway station where they came from and make sure that they all get out. And there was straw on the bottom of the cars. And already dead people laying around there that we had to carry out. And the rest had to march to the camp.

Anyway, it was not only German and Austrian Jews. There were people from France. And the Red Cross finally was sending packages. And these guys were fighting for these packages. Ripped it open and there was only-- there was dried beans in there. But they didn't cook them. They just ate them as they were, stone hard. Anyway, they were close to extinction. I don't remember whether they made it or not. But I think more than 50% didn't make it.

So, one day came a kommando. We have to leave the camp. The camp is going to be closed. They gave us each a piece of bread. Get your clothes and start marching. And we had to march to Dachau. But in the meantime, the weeks before, there were alarms, you know. Airplanes come, American. The Americans were very close at that time already. And we had duck in the barracks and so.

And so, we get on that march. It was supposed to be several days to go to Dachau by foot. And we had some soldiers escorting us. And every morning, we are less, less of these guys. And the other ones, they took off all the insignias, what they had on their uniforms, took everything off. Marched with us. And we came marching. We were pretty close to Dachau, maybe a day. And we were about six of us, good friends.

We said, maybe we are afraid when we get to Dachau they're going to kill us there finally. So we were going this roads. And it came to a bend. And the soldiers didn't pay no attention anymore. So we said as soon as the last ones have gone, there was a big side dump, we jump. So we left the whole troop and jumped in that hole. Waited till everybody is gone. Then we got out and we marched. Didn't know where to go, but we marched.

And we came to a place where they stored the hay and everything. We went up there and slept at night. In the morning came the people from that village or whether it was with the guns. Come down, come down, come down. And my friend is screaming, don't shoot, don't shoot, don't shoot. So we came down. They took us to the police station. And they let us go. Go ahead.

So, we went. Marched and marched. And in the afternoon, there came a woman on a bicycle. Going like crazy. Said what, what's a matter? What's going on? She said, the army are coming. They called the Americans armies. The armies are coming, the armies. And she drove on. And we said, well, the armies are coming, good for us. So we walk towards that little village.

It was actually another village. It was a bigger city. It was called [? Fersen ?] [? Feldberg. ?] And it was a German airfield next to it. And we went into that little village. We still here shooting like left and right. And we come to the middle of the village. And here were the Americans sitting on the tanks, smoking cigarettes, and laughing. And saying, oh, my god, is that-- that must be it then.

So only one of us could speak English, a friend of mine. And they brought us to the colonel, whoever was in charge. And we told them what happened. And he said, put them in the hospital. Put them in the hospital so they get taken care of. They put us in the hospital. And we were surrounded by wounded Germans, which are still laying with us in that

hospital. And the nurses coming in, screaming crying. The armies are here. They're here. They're coming close. And, oh, my god. They were crying because a lot of these guys got shot and got arrested.

Oh, we were-- but they took good care of us, gave us food and everything. We didn't have no hair and every-- they knew-- they must have know who we are, on our clothes, and on our weight, and everything.

Let me ask you, did you-- when you were in the camps, were you friends with Jews? Were they your good friends?

My friends?

Mm-hmm, in the camps, were they Jewish?

Oh, yeah, yeah, the most of them, yeah, except for this group of French people that we saw in that other-- in that last camp. But the most of them were Jewish.

And what kinds of things do they do? Did you see them ever-- did they ever practice their religion? Did you ever see spiritual--

Yeah, in the Theresienstadt, you could get marriage-- married Jewish style.

But what about in Auschwitz or in the labor camp later?

No. Oh, no.

Did people pray?

No, no, no. The funniest thing about us, this-- we called them kapos. These were Polish Jews that were they are long time, in charge of us from the SS. And they hit us more than the SS did, these guys. Yeah, they had these things. When we had to go in these bunk beds, they hit us more than the SS. But the SS-- I got one--

Wait, wait, let's reload.

You were going to tell me about the SS. You started talking about the kapos and you were going to say something about the SS. Why don't you go on.

Yeah, they were pretty rough too. I was once on the railroad unloading the coal. And the guy that was with us, I think I didn't give him the right. And so, he slapped me. I fell right on into the coals. But otherwise, I really didn't get hurt too much. I mean, I know they hit people that they had to go to the hospital in there. But I, personally, went through the whole thing pretty unscathed, you know.

What kinds of choices did people have in those circumstances? Could you make choices that helped ensure that you would live instead of die?

No, actually we didn't have any choices. We had to believe what they tell-- like they tell us you go in a labor camp, we had to believe this. The funniest thing was when they told us in Auschwitz we're going to that labor camp in Kaufering. We actually-- the train actually went through Vienna. I don't know how come.

And we looked out this windows. And we just-- if we could jump, we would have been-- we would have been free. And it went from Theresienstadt through Vienna to Poland. We went to the inner city. And then out and to Germany.

Did having been baptized as a Lutheran help you at all once you were in the camps? Did it make it easier for you?

No. No. There was nothing they could do. I mean, I don't remember anything. A Jew was a Jew. There was no difference. There was no priest or anything. And I know-- like when I said, we were in that hospital on the end of the

journey, they kept us. Then we finally got up. And they had schools where we were taken care of, sleeping. And we had restaurants where we could go to eat and everything. They took care of us.

And then there were trains come in, going from there to Munich, and from Munich wherever you wanted to go.

Back, during the war, did you-- were there people who tried to help you or other people that you saw? Did you see any people who tried to help in any way? Or particular soldiers maybe or kapos who tried to help?

No. The only people that really helped us were these railroad personnel. Some of them in Theresienstadt, when we got outside to unload, or load, or whatever, they took our letters. We gave them money or cigarettes.

And at Auschwitz, I know you were there only a short time, but tell me a little more about what it was like. What were the standards if you arrived at Auschwitz, what would happen if you were say 45, or if you were a kid?

Anybody that was not able looking for work got gassed. That we know for sure because we never saw anybody again. And the ones that are still-- that were still in good shape, they had in barracks. But we didn't work or anything. We just-- in the morning, we get our soup or whatever it was. And then we stayed in the open. And we made a big circle, one next to the other, and moving around like this just to keep us warm. And we didn't do any work, until after that week, they put us in a row. And said you, and you, and you, you can come. And they left for the other camp.

So, I don't know what happened to the rest. I assume whoever didn't get lucky enough-- I know a fellow that went with us, strong and gritty, he never came back. He must've died somewhere. I don't know where, either in Auschwitz or in another camp. A lot of them. So, I couldn't say how many got gassed and how many made it.

I mean, from the group that I knew, 700, I think I know only 20 or so came back that I know. When we met in Vienna again, you know. And my wife was-- we were actually liberated by the Americans. My wife was in a camp in Czechoslovakia. She got liberated by the Russians. And she came home to Vienna with a train full of Russians, but they didn't do-- didn't do no harm to her. But she was-- she was close to not make it. She was sick all the time. She had to holes here and a big hole here. She had no stomach, nothing. And--

So people could make no choices under those circumstances?

No.

Even to die when they wanted to. You couldn't kill yourself?

Well, they could. Like when I was in that little camp after Auschwitz, in that Kaufering was the name, we went to bed in the evening. And one of the guys, he was a lawyer, a strong guy, he was hanging. Hung himself overnight in the bunker. We woke up and here was-- so, if you wanted to kill yourself, you probably could.

So how do you think some people survived and some didn't survive?

I really don't know how it happened. I wasn't very strong. There were guys there twice my weight and a head taller and couldn't make it. If they got diarrhea or something, couldn't hold it anymore. They just were running out. How I came back is, for me, still a miracle how it happened. I don't know. I was close enough several times, but I got lucky. I didn't-- I never got sick. I think I was in the hospital once, one day or something, that's all.

And how it-- how this gets selected, I don't know. They are better guys and stronger guys that should live now instead of me. I just got lucky. We had all kinds. We had laborers. We had doctors. We had lawyers. We had you name it. And a lot of them didn't make it. So, I don't know. I always said somebody up there must have liked me, because I can't-- can't figure it out that I'm here, still here.

And I had so many close calls and still. I don't know. And my wife recuperated. And in 1947, our daughter was born. And she was so tiny, 2 pounds I think. That my wife was afraid to hold her. She used to cry, take her, take her. So I had

to take her. And now she's strong, 5-foot-9 or something.

And we always said-- when we came over here, she was four years old. And she was so skinny. She didn't eat already nothing. We always said Wonder Bread made her grow, the Wonder Bread is what got her up. And now she has three of her own.