

Synopsis of interview  
with Kutner, Esther

- 00:00:00 Want to focus on your life before the Holocaust. I want you to share some of your memories. If you could just give me a brief summary first.
- 00:00:30 I was a child. I was unsophisticated. Children at this time were supposed to be seen, not heard.
- 00:01:00 You obeyed the parents without question. You were supposed to be respectful. I went to school.
- 00:01:30 After school, I went to another school to learn Hebrew. I always was a book person.
- 00:02:00 And I still am. I used to wish for the time to read, and now that I have it, my eye sight is poor.
- 00:02:30 I used to sit in the wide window seat and read and watch people passing; or in a small room behind the stove and read adventure stories and imagine things.
- 00:03:00 I was always the heroine. Life was pretty smooth. My dad passed away before the war. That is my only positive experience from before the war, and I have to explain what I mean.
- 00:03:30 Dad died from complications from pneumonia. He was buried and we sat shivah. I'll explain what that is.
- 00:04:00 It is seven days of morning. The mourners sat on stools. The neighbors came in to visit. It was a sad time, but now I look back at it as a normal time.
- 00:04:30 But the way I lost the rest of my family - that is not natural, that is so painful. It is unforgettable and unforgiveable.
- 00:05:00 I survived because the American army picked me up on the road more dead than alive. I was just bones.
- 00:05:30 I'll stop here so you can ask questions.  
Q: Tell me about the rest of your family before the war.
- 00:06:00 A: I had a sister and two brothers. I was the oldest. Describes appearance of parents.
- 00:06:30 Where were you living before the war?  
A: I was living in Brzeniny (she spells it out). It was one of the major ghettos in Poland.
- 00:07:00 It was a small town but it was cosmopolitan. As a child I was not involved much in the community. I cannot tell you much.  
Q: Do you have any recollection of the first time you heard about Hitler?

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- 00:07:30 I would like to finish about my family. I was dark-haired and green-eyed, a combination of the two parents. My sister was gorgeous. The boys also were divided, one blond, one dark.
- 00:08:00 A very handsome family. One grandchild looks like me, small features, and that's why I was mistaken often for not being Jewish.
- 00:08:30 The first time I saw a refugee, that was before the war, that was in our house.
- 00:09:00 I must say my mother was special. We always had an open house for anyone who was destitute, didn't have a place to stay for a week or two.
- 00:09:30 We were not rich, but she was rich in her heart. And every Sat. morning we would have a guest.
- 00:10:00 She would ask the men going to prayers to bring back a guest. Usually it was someone passing through. She would seat him at the head of the table, to honor him, to show that it was not a favor.
- 00:10:30 She said that we, the children, should not notice so as to not embarrass him. Then it would not be something nice. To me the refugee was comical. Every night
- 00:11:00 Every night I would see him washing his underwear, and I had never seen a man washing clothes. That is what was comical to me. But I didn't understand.
- 00:11:30 This is my first memory. At school, teachers were telling us that the Germans might invade.
- 00:12:00 Seven years before the war, the Germans signed a peace treaty with Poland. Then they began to arm themselves.
- 00:12:30 Poland was totally unprepared. Germany thought it was going to be a blitzkrieg.
- 00:13:00 Poland fell in three days. The Polish soldiers were shooting at the planes with rifles.
- 00:13:30 It was comical. During this time I was in my little town.
- 00:14:00 For some reason, the population started marching out of town. No one knew where we were going. People said we were going to Warsaw. Maybe older people you interview know why.
- 00:14:30 I remember masses of people marching. I remember one night we were sleeping on the ground -, this was Fall.

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- 00:15:00 I caught a cold with an infected bladder, and I have had trouble ever since. So this was the beginning.
- 00:15:30 For some reason, people changed their mind, and we came back to our little town.
- 00:16:00 Soon after this, the German occupation of our town began.
- 00:16:30 I was almost looking forward to it as an adventure. I was always curious.
- 00:17:00 I am still that way. In the morning I went downstairs. The occupation was already marching.
- 00:17:30 The street was full of soldiers. But nothing happened.
- 00:18:00 When I heard all this talk in school, I thought, "O my God, an enemy will invade my country."
- 00:18:30 I had experienced prejudice in Poland. But I loved my country and I didn't want an enemy to invade my country. How was I going to fight?
- 00:19:00 In Europe, the streets are paved with cobble stone. I thought that every time I saw a German soldier, I would pick one up and kill him. I had never seen a gun, and we had been raised in a very nonviolent way.
- 00:19:30 Little did I realize that my country was very ready to see the Germans, with the Jews because of the antisemitism.
- 00:20:00 Even before the deal Germans came in, at the University, Jews had to stand, not sit. And I went to a segregated school. I thought the whole world was like that.
- 00:20:30 One time, a new school was to be built, and the money was raised from everyone, including the Jews.
- 00:21:00 Let me tell you how segregated things were. Classes were all over town. My class was in a building with tailors. Our town was mainly tailors.
- 00:21:30 There were 60 in our class. Finally the city built a beautiful school.
- 00:22:00 But this school was for the gentile population. And we Jewish children got their old school.
- 00:22:30 But finally we all were in one school. You want to know about anti-semitism?

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- 00:23:00 We didn't go out at night - a man was stabbed. During Easter~~y~~ they carried those icons. that look like stretchers, but I don't remember what they were ~~called~~.
- 00:23:30 We would hide because we had killed Christ and we could get beaten up in a procession like that.
- 00:24:00 I saw such scenes from my window, As for more violent things, I was amidst~~e~~ Jewish people all my life.
- 00:24:30 By the way, the Germans had a segregated school too. The boys used to joke about it.
- 00:25:00 Q: What about the beatings?  
A: you ran from those things. You didn't see them.
- 00:25:30 They used to~~o~~ taunt us all the time. "Hey Jew, why don't you go to Palestine. But you don't have any PALESTINE because you don't know how to fight."
- 00:26:00 Now how things have changed. I remember I was giving a I remember I was giving a talk in a school when Israel was bombing in Lebanon.
- 00:26:30 After I told about ~~me~~ <sup>our</sup> uprising one of the kids asked what I thought about the ~~bombing~~ bombing, and would I fight now.
- 00:27: I asked him to come to the front and repeated~~d~~ the question - while I gathered my thoughts. I said that at the earlier time when we didn't fight, we were berated.
- 00:27:30 Now that we have a country and we have to protect ourselves, we are berated for being aggressive.
- 00:28:00 I said, "When I leave, have a discussion with the teacher." So it seems that I cannot win. If I live in a capitalist society, I am going to be accused of being a communist. If it's a communist society
- 00:28:30 I will be accused of being a capitalist. I usually say THAT WE ARE ALL THOSE THINGS.  
<sup>lower case</sup>
- 00:29:30 Lets talk about your experiences during the war. Were you out into a ghetto?
- 00:30:00 After a couple of days, then~~y~~ German soldiers took some of us girls and told us to come
- 00:30:30 To the community center and they cut our hair shoulder length. Most of the girls had long braids. I was so upset about it.

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- 00:31:00 I cried for two weeks after I got home. Later, my head was completely shaved.
- 00:31:30 Then, it didn't take long, they made a ghetto, As it happened our house was in the ghetto.
- 00:32:00 They put a family in each room. They could come into the house and plunder anything they wanted.
- 00:32:30 My uncle had a factory where they produced clothes. As a child, I remember standing and watching
- 00:33:00 as the truck pulled up and it was loaded with things from homes and the factory.
- 00:33:00 Food was rationed. There was no school, no doctors. Very soon they got hold of most of the intelligentsia because the pen is mightier than the sword.
- 00:32:30 How hungry we were - my mother got the rations once a month and divided things up into little packages.
- 00:33:00 Upstairs lived a family with three children. When it came to the end of the month, the children were screaming from hunger. The male in the family, when he got hungry, poor thing, he couldn't hold it and he ate the food.
- 00:33:30 My mother would share what we had, saying that the children were hungry, we had to share.
- 00:34:00 At one time I decided I wanted to bring extra food into the ghetto. My grandfather was living in a very tiny village.
- 00:34:30 The Germans called it The Protectorate. It was always a pack of lies. We thought the people were going to be free, but it wasn't true.
- 00:35:00 I told my mother I would sneak out at night and bring back a loaf of bread. She wouldn't let me, but I said I would anyway. By the way, in the ghetto we needed
- 00:35:30 A yellow band with a star. It made me angry because I was being demeaned.
- 00:36:00 I couldn't walk out like other people. I had a gentile friend. We were close - at Christmas time I helped make decorations.
- 00:36:30 When she saw me, looking out of the fence, and I called to her, she looked away. There was nothing more the Germans could do to me - that was supposed to be my friend; that was supposed to be my country.

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- 00:37:00 What hurts me so badly is that my country was so ready to cooperate with the Germans, ~~z~~ to do away with us. We knew what to expect from the Germans.
- 00:37:30 To this day I can't forgive them. I wouldn't go visit this country for nothing in the world. When the war broke out I was 11  $\frac{1}{2}$ .
- 00:38:00 We were in the ghetto for two years. Then it was closed and we were resettled. We couldn't take anything with us, just a few pounds.
- 00:38:30 You put it in a sheet and carried it over your shoulder. Subsequently, we had to leave it. But they knew you were going to put into it your best.
- 00:39:00 Finally we were shoved onto carts and wagons. Finally we arrived at the ghetto.
- 00:39:30 You are always <sup>some</sup> afraid. You don't know where you are going. I'm still with the family. There was security in that. It is ironic. I was the weakest in the family. Everyone catered to me.
- 00:40:00 I was the oldest but for some reason I was considered the weakest. There was always an extra bite of food. Others were full. The irony is that I survived. (tears)
- 00:40:30 How do you explain that? I was the weakest and I am here. (wipes away tears.)
- 00:41:00 When we came into the second ghetto, it was a completely different story. The Litmunstaat (ph) ghetto was a concentration camp. Jews were concentrated into two large ghettos.
- 00:41:30 When I came in I saw people, starving, dropping from hunger. I could see people hold on the walls just barely walking.
- 00:42:00 Our original ghetto was wooden, and I was able to get out. I was able to get bread once or twice, but then my life was endangered, by the Polish boys by the way.
- 00:42:30 This ghetto was with electric wires. The rationing was different. In the first ghetto, people were rounded up and disappeared. Here, people were rounded up, from the street
- 00:43:00 Sometimes whole blocks were shipped out somewhere. This made room for the new arrivals from the smaller ghettos.

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00:43:30 That was the German plan. We were so in the dark. All we could do is hope the war would be over soon.

00:44:00 Just stay alive. The family was so close, the love. We watched over one another.

00:44:30 There must have been Springs, and Summers, but I only remember the Winters and the cold. Wherever we were, I remember the cold.

00:45:00 I am not a good witness because I can't remember dates, just approximate dates.

00:45:30 The only time I lost hope was in Auschwit<sup>h</sup>z.

00:46:00 I don't know whether you want me to close the ghetto.

A: No, go ahead.

To explain my survival I have to connect it to the first ghetto. one day, someone knocked on the door and in walked a young boy.

00:46:30 About 16, raggedly dressed, covered with scabs. He had escaped from a labor camp and was able to get into the ghetto.

00:47:00 Mamma said to clean him up, and I was a little surprised because I was a girl, but I did what she said. And then the whole saga begins to come out.

00:47:30 He says he wants to stay in the ghetto a while and then make his way to the L ghetto. He tells me he comes from a prominent family, his brother had a prominent position and once he gets there he will be fine.

00:48:00 I didn't believe what he said because young girls know that boys brag. He asked me to give him a picture of me, signed, that would be a good=luck token.

00:49:00 I was so naive that I was afraid to give it to him. He left. When I came to the ghetto, I asked if there was a person by that name, and there was.

00:49:30 I could have made myself known to him but I was always too proud to ask for anything. People in important positions can be helpful.

00:50:00 One time I came home and asked my sister where my mother was. She said she wasn't there, that she must have been rounded up.

00:50:30 It is my nature to quickly set about solving problems. That.'s still true. I can't cope now with my happy times because there is no one to share it.

- 00:51:00 Back to the ghetto. When I heard Mom is not there I decided now I am going to see this prominent person./ I dressed in my finery, and found his office.
- 00:51:30 I told the guard I had an appointment. He didn't know what to do so he let me pass. The same with the next guard. I walked into the office and behind the desk
- 00:52:00 Sat a tall blond man who looked like his brother and I told him his brother had been in our home and he said he knew. I thought he must have known through the underground.
- 00:52:30 I asked about his brother and he said the guards killed him. So the boy had been telling the truth. Then he asked what he could do for me.
- 00:53:00 I told him my mother had not come home. He looked at me and told me to go home. Next day, mom came home and we had her for another year.
- 00:53:30 Another connection with survival. One day I was rounded up. I was put in a huge courtyard. They locked the gate.
- 00:54:00 The people were put around the wall, and the Judenmeister (ph) was standing with his hands ~~xxxx~~ behind his back. He stops in front of me, asks my name and gives me a piece of paper and says that tomorrow morning I should
- 00:54:00 Come to this address. I did, and I still can't believe what I saw. Beautiful girls are sitting there, long hair, well-fed.
- 00:54:30 She sees this piece of paper, and on the paper is written what she has to do for me. She sends me to the head of the Jewish community.
- 00:55:00 I arrived at the address and it was a kitchen. At this time if you worked in a kitchen, it meant that you worked in a warm place, and that once a day you had a bowl of soup.
- 00:55:30 And it meant you weren't rounded up. This kitchen was cooking soup for workers next door who were producing uniforms for the German army.
- 00:56:00 If you could work in a kitchen, you had it made. When I started peeling the potatoes, I made them so small it would have taken five years before you could use them.
- 00:56:30 So she gave me some other work to do, but I was just as bad. But instead of just letting me out into the cold so she told me to supervise the amount of potatoes the women were peeling.





- 00:03:30 When she knew they were coming, she led us to this basement. We had to walk through water up to the knees. Two other families saw my mother going, so they went too.
- 00:04:00 One women had a babby and when the baby cried, she used to put her her hand on the mouth. When the Nazis came in, they came with a lot of noise, yelling.
- 00:04:30 We heard people being chased out; we were standing in the water all night and finally we heard it was quiet. But it was such an erie feeling that you wished you had gone with the other people.
- 00:05:00 We didn't know what happened to the people, but it was only a few days and other people came in from other ghettos. No one ever came back.
- 00:05:30 You never knew - some people said they went to a labor camp. One day, the order came they were going to put the young children in a summer camp.
- 00:06:00 Believe it or not, we believed it. Who is going to harm a child. Us, yes, but not a child. I being the oldest, took the responsibilty. My mother used to be spunky, but she was beaten on the street.
- 00:06:30 Her whole spunkiness went out. Then, since I was the oldest, I had to take responsibility for everything. Any little infection you got in the ghetto, you died.
- 00:07:00 So I was the one who cared for infections and wounds. I opened up wounds and bandaged.
- Q: What do you remember about the time your mother was beaten?
- 00:07:30 I was angry. You try to pacify the person. You tell her not to go out again.
- 00:08:00 To get back to my younger brother. I feel I am responsible for his death. For the summer camp, we were supposed to bring the children to a certain place.
- 00:08;30 I gathered some food and put it into a knapsack. I practiced with him to write a letter.
- 00:09:00 My youngest son is named Nissam, after him. And I had him practice how to write home. And we brought him there in the hope he would go to a summer camp.
- 00:09:30 And we found out after the war what they did - they gassed them.
- Q: And how do you feel about that?
- AL How do you feel? (tears)

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- 00:10:00 Pain never escapes you. Of course, you try to do your best. But it never leaves you.
- Q: When was the ghetto liquidated?
- A: I was in the ghetto another two years, approximately.
- 00:10:30 That's when they put us up in cattle cars, for 3 or 4 days, like sardines. No food, no drink and no room for elimination. You can visualize what it was like.
- 00:11:00 People were yelling and screaming, and fainting. And after a few days it gets quiet. Then they opened the doors. That I will never forget.
- 00:11:30 At the horizon I could see some very strange buildings. And I thought to myself
- 00:12:00 If this is where we are going, it looks like HELL, AND no one will come out alive. And this was Auschwitz. When they opened the doors, more dead than alive came out.
- 00:12:30 Then they lined us up. And to this day, I remember miles and miles of people, in rows, always being counted.
- 00:13:00 Soldiers with legal pads, writing down names. The Germans are methodical people! Everything has to be written down.
- 00:13:30 We were lined up. I'm holding on to my mom with my left hand. On the other side is my sister, and my brother holding on to her. A tall SS man stopped in front of us.
- 00:14:00 They say it was Mengele. With all the military insignia and boots.
- 00:14:30 I never watched "Hogan's Heroes" because of the boots, and making a comedy of the obscenity. But I let my children watch because I didn't want them to be different from other children. But I left the room.
- 00:15:00 With a twist of the thumb, I was sent in one direction and my family was ripped away from me forever. That was the end of it.
- 00:15:30 Even in the first ghetto, babies were torn away from their mothers. And this was done on High Holidays. It was done purposely to taunt us, "Where is our God."
- 00:16: I found out after the war that my family had been gassed at Auschwitz. (tears)
- 00:16:30 I was spared because I look well. My mother was considered old. My sister had A LIMP.

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- 00:17:00 This was from working in the winter. In the winter the steps are filled with ice. My sister was helping a woman and she fell and hurt her knee. Once you were hurt, you were gone.
- 00:17:30 He saw she was limping. And my younger sister was a child. After the war we found out they were gassed. I remember, when we were at Auschwitz, I went to the latrine at night.
- 00:18:00 I ~~was~~ works with an older woman - when I say older, I mean more than 30. Those who survived were mostly teenagers.
- 00:18:30 She pointed to the red sky and said they were burning people. In my own mind, I worked it out that she had lost her mind.
- 00:19:00 I always have an answer. The Germans needed people for the war. And they are so immaculate.
- 00:19:30 I said they were burning trash, and after the war we found out what trash they were burning.
- 00:20:00 Q: How did you feel about being lonely?  
A: At the time, you didn't have time to feel anything.
- 00:20:30 You were thirsty, hungry, you were being chased. Such language was being used.
- 00:21:00 People were calling out the names of their children, holding on to them - it was just terrible. (tears)  
People don't know about these things; how can you tell them.
- 00:21:30 They beat you because you weren't supposed to be screaming. It as just a bewildering scene. So then we were chased and ordered to undress. Everything was ~~fast~~, schnell.
- 00:22:00 We had to disrobe completely. That's why when people ask if I have anything, I don't know where they are coming from.
- 00:22:30 What I am missing most is a picture of my family I would give my arm for it. Its hard to go through life without anyone attached to you. And yet I shouldn't complain too much.
- 00:23:00 At least I remember them. There are younger survivors who don't. It must be worse for them. So I guess I am lucky, although my children were raised without aunts and uncles.

- 00:23:30 To tell you how bad it is. When my son got married - you know what the chupa is - where the bride and groom stand
- 00:24:00 And the family<sup>b</sup> stands around and the whole ceremony takes place there. You've never been to a Jewish wedding?  
A: I didn't know what it was called.
- 00:24:30 I didn't expect to react that way, so I didn't even have a handkerchief with me. I thought, I had ~~LIVED~~ to see one of my children married. I remember my mother's wish that
- 00:25:00 She ~~live~~<sup>d</sup> to see one of her children married. I remember that every Saturday we dressed up and went out to parade on the street.
- 00:25:30 You met your friends and walked around. I remember when I got back my mother would say, "Oh, you're so beautiful I wish to see the day you're married."
- 00:26:00 And a strange thing happened to me under the chupa - the tears are streaming down, I can't stop, and I don't have a hankie.
- 00:26:30 And I was thinking about my momma, and like a kaleidoscope of my life.
- 00:27:00 All I could see was my life, my mother and my son. She would have been so proud of them as grandchildren.
- 00:27:30 I am trying to tie up my life now.
- 00:28:00 I have been studying two years, and of the three women, I was given the honor of reading from the Torah.
- 00:28:30 When I was reading the Torah, and it was a difficult reading, word by word, I have come
- 00:29:00 As close to God as one can. It was such a spiritual experience. And I did it so well that after, the older men told me that anytime I wanted to ~~to~~ read the Torah to let them know.
- 00:29:30 So that's why I say that I feel that I am tying up my life now.
- 00:30:00 My two brothers could not be Bar Mitzvah because of the war, so I felt I was being Bar Mitzvah for them. After the rabbi asked if I wanted to say a few words.
- 00:30:30 So I said a few words from my heart, and there wasn't a dry eye. Now I have told you why I wanted my Bar Mitzvah.

- 00:31:00 Now we'll go back to Auschwitz.
- 00:31:30 We were standing naked. Then they gave us a pail of water and it was passed around to everyone. There was a guard
- 00:32:00 And in front of him was a mound of dark rags. They threw at you a piece of dark rag.
- 00:32:30 It was our clothes to go into the barracks. It was to rob you of your human dignity.
- 00:33:00 Then someone came and shaved your head. After this preparation, you were chased to the barracks. You lost your identity. You feel like a shadow.
- 00:33:30 Mostly teenagers were selected to live. There were some people in their 30's, but they didn't survive. Now we come into the barracks.
- 00:34:00 Nothing more sinister could be invented. No language has been invented to describe labor camps, concentration camps.
- 00:34:30 Like Dante's Inferno. On one side of the wall they erected three-level shelves. They were maybe three feet wide.
- 00:35:00 Each level was about half a yard high. On each shelf they put in 3 or 4 people, in each direction.
- 00:35:30 Actually they didn't need more space because people were constantly being eliminated. You were out there till they could eliminate you. Like matches in a match box.
- 00:36:00 There were meals once a day. I remember the Jewish Community Center had an Israeli Showcase and one of the Showcases was a room dedicated to the Holocaust. I had a phone call
- 00:36:30 I was asked what color Auschwitz was. I said to make it gray - there was no color, it was all gray. It was a grim grayness.
- 00:37:00 There were constant selections, beatings, screaming. At each selection you were stripped naked. After a while, you just lost consciousness of that. You didn't look at yourself.
- 00:37:30 You had to turn around. If your body was still a little filled out, you went to one side, if it wasn't, you went to another. You were disposed of. But we didn't know what happened to people.

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- 00:38:00 In the bunks, we talked about before the war, and what we would like to eat. So maybe it was better that we didn't know. Besides everything else there were those roll calls.
- 00:38:30 Regardless of the weather, you were chased out of the barracks, and you had to stand in long rows. They said that only Hitler was sadistic
- 00:39:00 In the winter, the wind was very cold, so when we huddled they separated us with sticks or rifles. That's how sadistic they were. After the war, they said nobody knew, Hitler did it all.
- 00:39:30 We stood for hours, while they talked with one another. How anybody can be in a mood to stand there in front of such a mess, starving, cold
- 00:40:00 Is beyond me. We were such a mess of refuse. Yet they seemed to be very happy. They loved animals, but to them we were less than animals, something to be disposed of.
- 00:40:30 How do you explain that? <sup>One</sup> of those roll calls, my right leg got completely frozen, from the toes almost to the ~~wast~~. Why one leg? I was standing barefoot on ice, so I put my right foot on my left
- 00:41:00 So one leg froze. I had large wounds, I could see the bone, and I have had trouble with the leg ever since. I used to take rags and wrap them around the leg.
- 00:41:30 Then I had an infection around my neck. My whole right side is not right. I can barely walk. But my leg is still there so I'm not going to complain too much.
- 00:42:00 I was lucky I was so tiny, I was able to run and hide. I don't know if men were treated differently than women.
- 00:42:30 About 10 years ago there was a film, Holocaust. A lot of people thought the film didn't portray it right. It wasn't so horrendous or people wouldn't watch it.
- 00:43:00 There was a little story - when the lady ends up in the camp and the husband comes to visit there, she says, "Joseph, you know what?" and she pulls off her boots, and there is no way she would have boots, she sits on a chair but there were no chairs.
- 00:43:00 And she also has long hair. Then she pulls out a bunch of pictures from her pocket and no one had pictures. There were no males, the females were completely separated.

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00:45:30 Q: Describe a typical day in the barracks

A: It depends on the camp in which you were. There was roll call and there was the barracks.

00:46:00 There were constant selections. I even suspected at one time that there weren't gas chambers. You were supposed to go in to those showers.

00:46:30 I saw them. one day, six or seven of us were sent ~~back~~ ~~to~~ our barracks, I don't know why. I have no explanation for that.

00:47:00 Now we're coming to a number. No, I didn't. I just found out two years ago why I don't have a number. We had a meeting at the U. of Richmond and people gave talks.

00:47:30 There was a psychiatrist and her husband a lawyer. They were interviewing survivors and researching documents.

00:48:00 He interviewed me and asked me if I had a number and I said no. I thought maybe by the time I got there, they didn't have enough time.

00:48:30 He said he would tell me why I didn't have a number. Because children weren't given a number, they were assigned to be gassed.

00:49:00 There are still things we don't know about.

Q: Do you have any idea why your life was spared?

A: Int: I know that young women were often used for experimentation. Could that have anything to do with it?

00:49:30 Maybe it was just something written un my face. On the other hand, people always liked me. Like the supervisor in the kitchen.

00:50:00 I have even stranger stories. A vicious Nazi at another camp, but I'll get to that. This particular story I have just began to tell.

00:50:30 Someone asked me about the experimentation. It could have happened. But do you think that if it had, I would tell about it.? It would have been buried with me.

00:51:00 We call it miracles. Miracles happen every day. How can you <sup>some</sup> something good about the Nazis, but it happened to me.

00:51:30 I was in one so-called labor camp, in a God-forsaken place. I was in Sydenham (ph) College and sitting next to Dr. Sydenham and I started to talk about this place.



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00:52:00 I said that everyone talks about Auschwitz and Buchenwald but I was in one place that was worse. It was called Glogow. He said he had been there.

00:52:30 He had spent several years in Germany doing research and had written several books. He was the first one who said he knew of it. I want to tell you what kind of labor it was.

00:53:00 We went in 1500 young girls, and 9 of them were alive after the war. Just by mistreatment, freezing

00:53:30 In three months, nine of us were left. When I was picked up by American troops I was more dead than alive. When you came in this particular camp

00:54:00 We came into stables. But it was not like American stables. For the time we were there, they put straw one time on the bare ground.

00:54:30 There wasn't even a hole for a latrine. In the morning we received a piece of bread for the whole day. After they counted us, we marched for several miles.

00:55:00 We arrived where we worked and dug ditches for soldiers to hide in. The ground was icy frozen. The guards are on top of us.

00:55:30 Yelling at us, calling us lazy. We wish we could have worked then we could have stayed warm. Hungry. No clothes on our back. Dysentery.

00:56:00 Other diseases. Anyone who couldn't work anymore was put in a hut and they died. It was only to finish us off. Useless.

00:56:30 We used to put the bodies in a little wagon - the camp was surrounded with a fence. They were rolled out, sick or dead.

00:57:00 END OF TAPE II

TAPE III

00:00:00 My leg had gotten to be so bad that I was getting to be no good for anything. I was shoved into a room with others who couldn't work, and everybody goes to work.

00:00:30 There were about 100 women in the room. I don't know what's going to happen. The door opens The camp commandant comes in, very happy with himself, grinning actually.

- 00:01:00 He walks in, stops in front of me, and asks me my name. They never ask you your name. You're just dirt.
- 00:01:30 They call you names or nothing. I gave him my name and writes it down. Next day, everyone leaves for work, the door opens and someone calls me.
- 00:02:00 They put me in the center of the courtyard. I figure I'm going to get killed now. I stand there, for an hour or so, in my rags. Oh, ~~no~~; when he came in there to write my name
- 00:02:30 He asked me (in German) if I could work. And I answered yes (in German) - you don't want to be shipped out in that little wagon. The next day, when he came up to me, ~~he~~ took his stick and raises up the rags on my head
- 00:03:00 And all I could think of at that time was. "O my God, I have no hair." (She laughs)
- 00:03:30 He looked down at me and said, "Du has keine soes." You have no shoes. Then he says, "Bist du hungrie?" I didn't say anything. I was afraid to answer.
- 00:04:00 So after a while he comes back, brings me a pair of shoes, brings me a big piece of bread, and tells the supervisor ~~of~~ from the block - like in the ghetto, the supervisors were Jewish. They were very disliked but they had to carry out out orders.
- 00:04:30 The supervisor of the camp. I still remember her name, Julitzkah (ph). And she was to assign me the type of work to do.
- 00:05:00 The type of work was - those girls had to push those little wagons. Just like horses. And the dead bodies were on the wagon. God only knows how far we walked.
- 00:05:30 We walked to the forest and then we buried them. I understand this is not the only forest in Germany and Poland that is full of the bodies of our girls. (tears)
- 00:06:00 And nobody knows about it. I did it for about two days and then I couldn't do it anymore. I couldn't do it emotionally. I couldn't stand putting sand on those bodies. (cries)
- 00:06:30 Crying deeply Can't stop.
- 00:07:00 I'm sorry.

- 00:07:30 At this point, I thought that it didn't matter anymore. What would be would be. The supervisor reported that I was not a good worker, that I didn;t carry my load. She had to do it.
- 00:08:00 The Germans were smart. They didn't do the dirty work. So now comes an unbelievable saga. When she told him that he said, "You want to work for me?"
- 00:08:30 What kind of work did he give me ? After everyone had gone to work, the guard was supposed to open up for me and I was supposed to go to his little bungalow.
- 00:09:00 Every day when I got there, they ave me a big piece of bread - was it delicious - and they gave me a broom, and I was supposed to sweep around there.
- 00:09:30 Why do I say it wasn't weasy? Guards were constantly marching around. What was there to sweep? I was afraid to stand ariund and do nothing.
- 00:10:00 I used to think. "Dear God, can you make the wind blow so that there will be something to sweep." When the guards walked towards me, I used topretend to be sweeping.
- 00:10:30 Little did I realize this was close to the end of the war. Because the commander called me in one time and told me to sit down, and I was so filthy, and this camp we were so full with lice.
- 00:11:00 So I didn't want to sit down, and he said to sit down, quick. AND HE PULLS OUT A LETTER AND TELLS ME TO READ it. He intercepted it from some labor camp.
- 00:11:30 It was a Polish labor camp. By the way. I would like to correct something. Polish people were not sent to concentration camps for elimination. They were sent to labor camps. There was a movi~~e~~ "Sophie's Choice,"
- 00:12:00 ~~00:12:00~~ And they do that there. Anyway, the corres- pondence wasof no significance. He asks me, "Who is going to win the war/" What a strange question for him to ~~x~~ ask me.
- 00:12:30 And is said "Ich veist nish" I don't know. No, before that he asked me how old I was. and he was surprised because I was so thin. He said to me. Du bist fligge"
- 00:13:00 Which means that I was not telling the trut~~h~~. I didn't know until after the war why he didn't be~~lie~~ve, because young people were killed.

- 00:13:30 He asked me who was going to win the war. I shrugged my shoulders. But inside I knew who would win, because if justice cannot prevail
- 00:14:00 I might not survive, but he was not going to win the war. When the death march started, whenever I was selected out, he would put me back.
- 00:14:30 Not only did he pull me out, he gave me food. After a while I lost him, he was probably called to the front. I have no explanation except that as a father, something must have moved him.
- 00:15:00 That's the only explanation that I have. Miracles happened to me. People were whispering about me.
- 00:15:30 The experiments that went on, we didn't know about it. If someone was taken for something like that, we never knew about it. And I wasn't taken.
- 00:16:00 Being in this particular labor camp, all I can remember is harsh conditions -, the food, the work, the lice, the cold. One time, the girl lying next to me was screaming she had so much pain.
- 00:16:30 I told her to lie with her body next to mine so maybe the warmth would calm her down. And that is what happened.
- 00:17:00 Q: Can we go over the camps you were in?  
A: I was in Glogow. Then in Auschwitz. I was in one camp such a short time I don't remember. Then I was in another camp in which I don't know the name/
- 00:17:30 I don't remember names. I was in four camps, at least. During the death march, we would walk for a week at a time and stop somewhere,
- 00:18:00 It was called a death march because anyone who couldn't march would get a bullet. We would drag them a little further. It didn't make sense, but they would get the bullet a little later.
- 00:18:30 I was always selected during this march. It lasted for several months. During the march, we would stop for sometime. Most of the time, we marched 20-25 miles. We started from Auschwitz. Usually we slept on the ground.
- 00:19:00 I was under the impression that the destination was to get us into Dachau to eliminate all of us so that there would be no living witnesses.

- 00:19:30 They closed Auschwitz because the Allies were closing in. During the day time, they chased us very fast.
- 00:20:00 We were eating dirty snow from under our feet. Some times there were no meals at all. There was no time to stop . Their plan was to get us where we re going, as fast as possible.
- 00:20:30 At night, we just dropped wherever we were and slept. I ran away. I remember at one point we pssed through a river
- 00:21:00 At this point I lost the commander who was looking out for me and I knew I was going to get a bullet. I couldn't walk anymore. As we passed the river, I was toying with the idea of jumping in and finishing it.
- 00:21:30 One night, while I was sleeping, mom came to me. This was the only time it happened. So I interpreted it that I should live.
- 00:22:00 Int: You're starting to talk very quickly. Relax and slow down.
- 00:22:30 Yet I couldn't make it, my leg was so bad. I tried to escape one time . . . After the dream, it went on -, the pain, the rain, the snow.
- 00:23:00 I szw a girl eating grass and she was killed, that was a lazy guard, that wasn't Hitler. It was just getting worse and worse. One time, we were sleeping in an enclosed place
- 00:23:30 It was a stable, and I saw hay so I climed<sup>b</sup> up to hide. But an SS came in an started poking the hay.
- 00:24:00 So I went to the end and climbed won and mingled with the crowd. I realized that I was going to get a bullet because my leg was so bad.
- 00:24:30 It was infected and I was so thin. One night we were sleeping on the ground and it was pouring. The guards went into a building to sleep and I saw an opportunity.
- 00:25:00 I thought at least I could die on my own. So, the girl who was sleeping next to me, I said, "You want to go?" She said OK, and another girl asked to go too.
- 00:25:30 Whule I was thinking, I realized that we were at the forest. So we crawled on all fours into the bushes. While we hid in the bushes , in the morning, we coild hear the guard screaming that six were missing.

- 00:26: Four were with me. We didn't go far because the ground was hilly. We thought we went far but it was pitch dark and we could hear them cursing.
- 00:26:30 I don't know where the other two were. After a few hours, the girl who wanted to go with me, she died.
- 00:27:00 The other three, we made it.  
Int: Please tell me the story of your escape again, in a short version, three sentences.
- 00:27:30 I decided on the death march, to secape. It was pouring buckets. During the day, I saw the forest. I asked the girls on either side of me if they wanted to go. They said yes.
- 00:28:00 A fourth girl joined us and we crawled on our hands into the forest, which seemed an eternity but it wasn't far at all. In the morning they sent blood hounds after us.
- 00:28:30 For unexplainable reasons the bloodhounds did not smell us out. One girl died and the rest survived.
- 00:29:00 Int: You present yourself in a way that is different from other survivors. I can tell you have told your story many times.  
K : Not in such depth. I don't go to pieces.
- 00:29:30 Memories - burying the girls; the escape; the way we wandered for 12 days. We had no idea the war was coming to an end, We had to hide from the Hitler Jugend.
- 00:30:00 We witnessed in one house, it was the burgermeister's house, the German army, throwing down their uniforms and putting on civilian clothes.
- 00:30:30 Afterwards they say they didn't see nothing, Hitler did it all. I tell you how I feel about Hitler. We have a book fair every year. There was only one book about Hitler, twenty-six dollars.
- 00:31:00 I bought the book. My husband doesn't know. (starts to cry) Why did he do that to us. What did we do. Why was it done. Why did we deserve it? \*
- 00:31:30 After the war I was in many hospitals. Its very strange. We walked so much and I couldn't walk anymore. Its the mind that makes you walk.
- 00:32:00 In the hospital, a German doctor sits on my bed and says, "Can you ever forgive us?" I thought his question was strange. Who was thingking about forgiving or not forfiving. I was lonely, confused

- 00:32:30 I didn't know where I was, I didn't know where I was going. I said, "I cannot force you to love me; I cannot force you to like me, but don't I have a right to live.
- 00:33:00 That says it all. He didn't say anything. But words cannot describe the pain, the loneliness. When people say its a day of remembrance, a day of speeches
- 00:33:30 I don't need this. I have the pain and it never gets less. They ripped you apart. There's only one consolation I have
- 00:34:00 When I was taunted by the Poles that I have no country and I don't know how to fight - they taught us how to fight and we became quite good at it.
- 00:34:30 They made us do it. And we have a country now. When there is anti-semitism, there is a country where we can go, and that is my consolation.
- 00:35:00 Int: If you're only going to remember one thing, what would it be?
- A: I hope people realize how senseless prejudice is. You incite masses of people against somebody you tell them something that most of the time is not true
- 00:35:30 But other people believe in it. I don't know - they need a fall guy. I hope people will search in their soul how senseless this is. I don't care what somebody believes
- 00:36:00 My mother used to say my religion is in my heart. She is my strength. She believed - treat others as you would want to be treated. And that is what I taught my children.
- 00:36:30 I can't think of anything more profound than that. I remember, I was doing some volunteer work
- 00:37:00 For underprivileged children. I was interviewed on television and she said, "How would you reply to people who said it never happened?"
- 00:37:30 I said I don't reply, because what can you say. She asked again, and I said I would say, I too wish it never happened.
- 00:38:00 Kutner is crying. The interviewer is telling her impression of Kutner.

- 00:38:30 People are amazed at me that I still trust people. I bought that book about Hitler and I haven't looked at it. I can't explain it.
- 00:39:00 I have an acquaintance. She can't understand. She is so bitter. She says I come up with a million answers; I find people to trust. I tell her to let me be me - I don't want to go through life the way she does.
- 00:39:00 The war doesn't come to an end. There still are decent people. When Nixon was running, I had to tell him that everyone does not do it (what?)
- 00:39:30 There are people in the community I admire - Truman and others, to give him examples that everybody is not.  
Q: About you and your husband, both survivors, do you rely on one another and share your experiences?
- 00:40:00 A: Survivors don't talk much about it. Just a word or two and they understand one another. For 12 or 13 years I didn't want to talk about the war. I couldn't even tell my children.
- 00:40:30 I had this idea, if I would tell them, they would then learn to hate. I didn't want them to LEARN TO HATE. Now if you want, I will tell you what did start me to talk.
- 00:41:00 I remember reading Elie Weisel's story and I thought here was someone else who couldn't talk. When my oldest son was about 7 years old
- 00:41:30 And he says, "What does it mean to be Jewish?" It was such a strange question to me. I worshipped America. I thought America was god-like, because I was liberated Americans
- 00:42:00 It is fantastic how they did - from one hospital to another; how they managed to leave messages. So I worshipped America. But after the war I didn't want to come here,
- 00:42:30 I said, "Enough with gentiles." I wanted to go to Israel. I had a passport. My husband found out that his father had made it to America. So we came here.
- 00:43:00 That's how we ended up here.