

First, I would like to ask you when where you born? Where you were born. What are your parents' name? Where did you live? What were their professions?

I was born in June, June 1, 1928, in a town called Kralovo nad Tisou, which was Czechoslovakia in those days. I was born to the most wonderful, democratic country.

My maiden name was Weisberger. My mother's name is Shari-- was Shari Weisberger. My father's name was Solomon Weisberger. Our family consisted of myself and two sisters, Lillian and Veronica Weisberger.

Our town was about 7,000 people. We-- as I said, I was born into the most democratic country, with all freedoms. And I went to a Czech elementary school, and associated with all sorts of other nationalities, and was treated as an equal. I never felt antisemitism until perhaps the late 1930s, when antisemitism seemed to be on the rise.

My father was a butcher, and we also had a grocery store. They were hard-working people, but had the freedom of conducting a business in a democratic country.

In 1939, we were invaded by Hungary. As Hitler invaded Sudetenland, he made a deal with Hungary and let them have the spoils of their previous countries, which this country was Austro-Hungary at one time. They felt that they had a right to this part of Europe.

Did you have any brothers and sisters, and how many?

Yes, two sisters, Veronica and Lillian.

Did you have any grandparents? And what's the occupation and name?

I only knew my grandmother. My grandfather had passed away before I was born. And I had many aunts, uncles in our town. My aunts were-- my aunts' occupation was they were seamstresses. They were seamstresses. One of my uncle was a tailor. My grandmother was also active in a-- she ran a small hotel.

Our town happened to be a railroad, central railroad station from East to West. There were trains that were traveling through from Romania to-- through Czechoslovakia to Hungary. And this was the main industry of the town.

I would like to continue. In 1939, when Hungary invaded, I was forced to change from Czech school to a Hungarian school. I was already in junior high school age, and had to take, in order to enter Hungarian school, I had to take a test, which I successfully did, and entered a Hungarian junior high school.

These started to be very turbulent years, in spite of the fact that I was still able to attend public school. Jewish people who are being denied a right to a business-- businesses were confiscated. They were-- men who were forced to go into labor camp-- into forced labor camps. My father was taken away. Starting in 1940, year after year, he was taken to forced labor camp, while my mother was stripped of all livelihood. She was forced to go into enterprises which were illegal in order to support her children.

At one time, she was able to procure soap, which was very difficult to get during the war years, and smuggle this from another town into our town. She used to carry it in a suitcase, and really endangered her life, and eventually was caught for doing this business, and was tremendously tortured by the Hungarian gendarmes. She was beaten up until she was really bruised, although she never admitted the source where she had bought the soap, because she would have gotten this other person into deep trouble as well.

When she was caught, and she could no longer continue this enterprise, she started buying fabrics in Romania and smuggling them-- smuggling the fabrics on her own body. She wrapped them on her own body under clothes to bring them back from Romania, and selling them at a somewhat higher price so she could make a livelihood for her children.

My father was taken to labor for-- forced labor camp. He would come home on furlough in worse condition every year. By 1941, '42, he would come home in terrible condition. And every time he would leave, we wondered if he would ever, ever return.

In our hometown, things kept getting worse all the time. After the Jews were confiscated of their livelihood, we were forced to wear the yellow star to identify us so that the non-Jewish population could scorn us, call us names, "dirty Jew," whatever. The same friends that I went to school with, that were good friends, now became our enemy.

In 1944, Hitler no longer trusted the Hungarian government to carry out his orders, so he himself brought in SS troops to collect the Jews. In April of 1944, we woke up one morning and found Hungarian gendarmes at our gates, ordering us to take whatever belongings we could. We were seeing families being led on the streets, which were the more affluent families. And we thought that they were only the ones that were being collected. But they systematically collected every Jewish family.

In every Jewish home, they descended with guns and ordered the people to collect whatever they could. There was very little food to be had in the house because it happened to be right after Passover, which is the holiday in which we do not eat bread. Therefore there was very little food available in the homes. So we just collected whatever we could, and we were marched off to the local synagogue.

At the local synagogue, we met all our loved ones-- our grandparents, aunts, uncles. It was-- the people were pushed into a very small area. The Jewish population of our town-- excuse me.

Oh. Excuse me. We had a population of about 7,000 Jews that was squeezed into-- our entire population was about 10,000. This might be-- may not be accurate, but the tremendous amount of Jewish people that were squeezed into this small area of the synagogue and had to spend the night there, had to spend a couple of nights.

But the first night was horrendous. I remember the elderly people who-- everybody found a corner, or perhaps those who had a bench were lucky. But the elderly people and the children were terribly uncomfortable. (SOBBING) There were cries of discomfort, the children crying. It was a night-- a total-- of total chaos.

After the night had passed, in the morning there were some kind neighbors that we had known. Also, the Catholic priest of the community had collected food, and brought it, and handed it through the fence of the synagogue so that people had something to eat.

We had to spend another night there, until the gendarme and the SS people had organized horses and wagons to transport us from our town to the city of Nagyszollos, which was designated to be the ghetto where the entire Jewish population of the whole state was collected there and put into this ghetto, which was made up of a small area of Nagyszollos that was fenced in, consisted of some Jewish homes where we had all-- we were all forced to live in this area.

So you're still with your parents together.

Still, yes. The entire family. The procession to Nagyszollos was also a sight to behold. The children and the elderly people were put on the wagons. The more able-bodied people walked.

My mother and I walked. We tried to carry our-- my two-year-old sister at that time. And it was a difficult journey. It was possibly something like 10 kilometers of walking.

And when we arrived there, we were assigned a room with-- where we lived with my aunt, my grandmother, and an uncle and his family that actually lived in this town. We all lived in this one room.

Food was very scarce. Somehow there was some food left over in these homes. We scrounged and we found some food. People tried to prepare whatever they had. The children were always hungry, demanding food, not understanding why they were denied food. [SOB]

We lived in these conditions approximately six to eight weeks, when they began transporting people. Also, we were under the impression then-- there were some rumors that we were being resettled to another country, to another land. People readily accepted this, because conditions were not very good in the ghetto. So they were willingly going to wherever they were going to transport us.

We were herded into railroad cars, into freight trains, children, elderly, adults, all into these freight trains, possibly 70 to 80 or more people, as many as they could squeeze into these freight trains. We traveled several days-- possibly two days and two nights-- under horrendous conditions. Food was not available. Water was not available. Human waste was being disposed of in a pot, if there was a pot available.

I remember the children became numb. (SOBBING) They could no longer cry. The elderly, my grandmother, who was possibly-- she was about 74 years old, totally lost her mind. She was babbling incoherently.

Anyway, this journey, we were never-- once the doors were sealed, | were never opened. On the way, we had stopped maybe once or twice, and we had heard some shots, that apparently people were crying out for water or for food. They were automatically shot.

When we finally arrived at our destination, at Auschwitz, we were herded out of these cars. Some people could hardly walk because of the cramped conditions. Those of us who could-- and immediately we were approached by men who were organizing lines. There were two lines. One was herded to one line, one was herded to the other.

My mother was holding my two-year-old sister in her arms. And my seven-year-old sister was hanging onto her skirt. And a man in striped clothing came to us. And he said, in German or in Yiddish, he asked my mother-- he took the child from my mother's arms, put it into my grandmother's arms, and asked me how old I was. I was 16 at the time.

And he said, say you are 18 years old. We had no idea what-- why or what he was doing. But we were willing to follow his orders.

Therefore, me and my mother were in one line. My grandmother, with my two sisters, was put into another line. And we, of course, were hoping, or we were told that they are going to a camp where elderly and children will be taken care of. So we willingly-- we willingly seceded, and followed the orders.

My mother and I were-- went through the long process of going through the showers, so-called showers. The belongings that we brought with us were dropped right at the trains. The clothing that we had on us we walked in with. We were told to undress.

And we went through the procedure of being shaven which was a most humiliating process for a 16-year-old girl, being shaven and examined by men. Our heads were shaven. We were also shaven in very unmentionable places.

After this, we were herded into showers, where we showered. And we were given, again, civilian clothing which were mixed. Sizes didn't matter. Shoes, whatever we could find or pick, we put on. We no longer recognized each other because we were completely shaven, and the clothing was-- either it was too large, or too small, or-- we looked hideous right from the beginning.

We looked the same way as the people that looked in behind the fences as we were approaching from the train. And they were hollering at us, if you have a piece of bread, throw it over the fence. And we thought they were deranged people. But at the end of the shower, we looked the same way. We looked as deranged as they did.

At this point, we were put into a camp, which was Block 6, And we were in Barrack 10. Excuse me.

It was Birkenau, was it?

Birkenau. In our particular camp, there were, in our particular section, there were 30 barracks with approximately 1,000

women in each barracks. This was only a small portion of Birkenau or Auschwitz.

There were-- we had some views of camps with men, which were approximately the same type of an arrangement. Occasionally there were women who worked outside, and they would come back and tell us that there are similar camps in the area.

The existence in Auschwitz, the ghetto existence was there, but now this was undescrivable. Undescrivable. The barracks were made up of wooden bunks. On these bunks there were three-- three-tier bunks. On each bunk there were possibly 30 to 50 women. There was enough room to lay on one side, if you were able to lay, or to be in a sitting position. You could not stand up, of course.

We were housed in this manner. We would receive a piece of bread and a bowl of soup, if you can call it soup. In the morning, we got a bowl of coffee. And this was usually done after the counting, which was called the Appell, every morning. Around 4 to 5 to 6 o'clock, before dawn, we were all marched out into the courtyard, and we were counted every day.

The counting procedure was to make sure that there were no escapees. There were many other reasons too. That those who died were deducted. Those who were weak or emaciated or were sick were immediately chosen and separated.

And at that time, the first two weeks, we were still naive. We didn't know what was the reason for this separation, or for this choosing-- for the choosing, which we later found out that these people went-- also went to the crematorium.

My aunt, who happened to be with us through this time, was very despondent And she kept saying, I must go where my mother and the children are. She cannot take care of them. Even though by now we had learned that all of these people were disposed of, went straight to the crematorium, she was too despondent to understand this.

And one morning, she willingly stepped out so the SS could put her in with those people who were being chosen. We could no longer reason with her, and she was taken. And her faith was the same as the others. She was-- went to the crematorium.

My mother and I existed on our streets during this time with the-- every morning Appell. Even the climate was terrible in Auschwitz. In April, March, there were a lot of rains, rains and mud. We used to stand for the count in mud. Our conditions, naturally, were worsened, Not only physically but mentally, learning about all these catastrophes. And also becoming aware of the smell of the burning flesh was very demoralizing.

During these Appells, one morning I was chosen also to-- because I was becoming-- I was a very underdeveloped girl, as it was. I was also chosen. However, when the SS turned, my mother managed to pull me back into the line. That meant that the SS recounted the line and found an additional girl at the end, and took that girl at the end of the line.

This kept going on, day by day. Another time I was chosen again, and my mother managed to sneak me back into the line again, until finally, about a month later, now we were told that a transport is being collected to go to a work camp. And we were lucky to be chosen and put into this transport.

Again, you went through the delousing procedure of being showered and shaven. And this time we were given striped clothing, prisoner clothing. And we were assigned a number, which my number was 39,440. My mother's number was 39,439, just before me.

We were put into freight cars, not as crowded as the freight cars we were transported into Auschwitz. It was-- we were transported during the night. And this was already-- one, two, three, May. It was still cold. We were in our single dresses. We were being transported through Stutthof, which was another camp, where we was-- where we were unloaded again.

We were counted again. Here we had gotten some food. And we were deloused again, and put onto a new freight train. We had no idea where our destination was.

This was our only time when we were being guarded by the army, not the SS, but the-- oh, what were they called? The regular German army. They were--

The Wehrmacht.

The Wehrmacht. Thank you. They were elderly men. They treated us very humanely. It was a very cold night that we were transported in, freshly bathed and in these single dresses. We were quite cold. One of the Wehrmacht took off his coat and covered us. This was the first and only humane human being that we found ourself during this horrible time.

We arrived in Poland. The town was called Bydgoszcz. In German, it was called Bromberg. Here we were unloaded and put into a camp, which was much smaller. I think we consisted of about 1,000 women.

And we thought we were in heaven, because here we had barracks with single bunk beds, with a straw mattress and a blanket. We were able to shower. We were able to keep sanitary. And we were assigned to work.

The Appell continued every morning, naturally. We were counted every morning. There were women who were assigned to different duties. There were women who were assigned to local jobs in the camp-- for instance, the kitchen or the sanitation crew. I myself was assigned to factory work, which every morning, after counting or standing Appell, after we had our black coffee, we were marched out through-- with guards, naturally, through a most beautiful forested area.

In this forest, there was a chain of factories which was so well camouflaged that no one ever knew what was there. Towards the end of the war, we heard many planes flying over. There was never a bomb dropped because it was so well camouflaged. They never knew what was going on there.

My duty was, with--

[INAUDIBLE] ammunition factories?

Ammunition factory. My duty, with another young girl, was to carry sacks of ammunition powder or powder that was eventually-- they added an explosive to it that was put into the bombs. We carried these sacks, loaded them onto a wagon, pushed the wagon to an elevator where we unloaded the sacks, that went to the next process, to the process of whatever-- adding explosives to it.

But our main job was, for my transport, the women were putting this powder into the sacks, that was processed there. And some of them were processing the powder. And that was going to the next process and the next factory. It was a chain of factories that went from one to the other.

The working conditions were difficult. We were working through the winter months with very little clothing, no stockings, wooden shoes. We even, we did-- in the same area, there were civilian Polish people that were working there. Occasionally, a good-hearted soul would put a piece of bread into our wagon.

Other than the factory, did you receive more food in other camps?

No. No. The food was provided-- every morning we marched from the camp to the factory and we returned in the evening. In the evening, we received our ration of bread and the bowl of soup in the camp. They provided no food at all at the factory.

So this was going on. My mother was fortunate. When the selection was done for the different jobs, she was selected to be a cook for the SS man. She couldn't believe her good fortune, because even though they were watched, they were able to eat, themselves, eat enough to satisfy themselves.

And as they turned out, they were very good cooks. My mother cooked Hungarian-style, which the SS were very

pleased with and liked it very much. They also used to cook big urns of soup for them. And from the soups, she used to manage to put away a pail of soup, and at night, after dark, managed to smuggle it into our barrack, and feed whoever could get enough out of that pail. That was tremendously helpful to myself, to the other people, because it helped to build up our strength, and it really helped to sustain us for a long time, even though she only worked one month in the kitchen.

She was caught handing out something to another inmate and was thrown out, out of the kitchen. Was severely punished for it. She was, overnight, she had to stand on a bunker with two pails, a pail of water in each arm, each hand, for being caught.

After that, she was also assigned to the factory work. She came every morning to the factory. Conditions were much more bearable than in Auschwitz, because we were-- had good sanitation, even though the food was scarce.

My mother, who was coming to the factory, one day got the bright idea of stealing one of the sacks. She wrapped a sack around herself and brought it back into the camp. The sacks were made of nylon fabric with a rubberized lining. She peeled away the rubber, and had this nylon fabric. When she had this, she talked to some of the girls who worked in the kitchen. I can make you a pair of panties if you can get me a needle.

She pulled out threads to make thread with. With this needle, at night, she would sew panties, brassieres. For a piece of bread, she would sell these to the girls, which also gave us additional food. She was very resourceful.

And so we worked there up until 1945, January. The war effort really was going in the favor of the Allies. The German were retreating. The food that was rationed to us was now being stolen by the camp commander, Kommando, camp Kommandant, and his men. They were-- I don't know-- selling it for-- getting money for it, or selling it for something else. So food was really being even rationed less and less.

The factories no longer functioned. They no longer had the material to manufacture. We were now being herded out in the woods, in the snow, to pick pieces of wood, for no reason at all. The wood wasn't used. Just to torture us.

We were walking in snow up to our knees, picking wood out of the snow, making piles for no reason at all. The SS were there. They built bonfires. They kept themselves warm and just let us do all this work.

This was going on until the end of January, when one day we were ordered to line up, and they marched us out of the camp. Marching out of the camp, walking, walking for days. On these wooden shoes, the snow would build up like a snowball. We could hardly walk. If anyone lagged behind, the SS would beat him or shoot him.

Food was none to be had. We were walking like this for days, until we started seeing civilian people fleeing with wagons, with suitcases, anything they could carry. And it became chaotic on the road. And before we knew, the SS men were disappearing. They were disappeared.

At this point, my mother and a group of us started lagging behind. And we saw a farmhouse. And my mother said, look, children. We're going to go to the farmhouse. Whatever happens happens. We'll go there.

So we went. We went into the farmhouse. They were Polish people. They were very kind to us. They let us come in. They gave us hot water to drink, a piece of bread, whatever they had.

But this was a resting place for not only the prisoners. Now Germans, fleeing Germans, SS men, everybody came in to warm up a little, to get a cup of hot water.

Now when the SS men came in, didn't they see the Jewish people there? Didn't they say nothing?

That's just it. We were scared. We were hiding in a corner. But by now, they were so, so worried about their own beings-- they were trying to save themselves-- that they didn't care anymore. They didn't care. The Polish people let anyone come in that wanted to come in, and they treated everybody equally. And the SS men came. They came and they

went.

And we remained in the house. We remained with the Polish people. And the front line was closing in from both sides-- the Russians from one side and the Germans from the other side, still fighting. The Polish people were very afraid.

They, at night, they went to the forest. They would leave the house and they would hide in the forest because there was artillery-- artillery fire. There was-- the war was going on.

So they asked us to go with them, and we said, no, we're not afraid of guns. We're more afraid-- we have gone through hell. We're not afraid of guns anymore. We're going to stay in the house.

The Polish family would come back every morning, go out at night. This went on for two or three days. And we remained in the house until the Russian army invaded and took over. And they-- the Russian army came in, and we greeted them, and we told them who we were.

They were wild. They were very wild. A lot of them were under the influence. They were also asking us for vodka. We didn't know what vodka was. In Czech, voda is water, so I brought him a glass of water. He spit it out at me.

But nevertheless, there were, unfortunately, there were some inmates, some prisoner girls that were shot in the process of the war. Some had shrapnel. Some were actually killed by bullets.

The Polish family was very grateful to us. They said that their house was saved because we were in it, because God-- God saved the house for them because of us. Whatever the reason was. Anyway, they were very good to us.

And after the Russians invaded, and we had gotten acquainted with some of the soldiers, we found that we could no longer stay there. We had to and we wanted to return to our hometown. Through this whole time, we were hoping that my father, who was in forced labor camp, had somehow managed to survive. And we were going back to find him.

Why did they, when they took you to Auschwitz, your father wasn't with you? [CROSS TALK].

No, he was in forced labor camp. He was in forced labor camp. In the forced labor camp, most men were working along the front lines.

They were digging the ditches. They were digging the bunkers. They were picking the mines. Many of them were blown up into pieces picking mines. This is what their duty was.

We started walking back to Bromberg from the farmhouse. On the way, we saw horrible sights of dead bodies, soldiers in all shapes, frozen on the ground. We did have the courage to take shoes and some clothing off these dead bodies that we put on so that we could walk back to Bromberg. It took us quite a long time to walk back. And at times we were afraid to encounter still a straggling German here or there.

When we walked back to Bromberg, we found a desolate town. All the German population have left town. They all evacuated deeper into Germany, hoping to save themselves, along with the SS men. The homes were abandoned.

The German soldiers gave us freedom to choose any home, any apartment, and make ourselves comfortable there. We did. We found a very comfortable apartment.

Even you went there, the German soldier were still there?

No. No. They had all-- they had flown. They had-- they ran away.

You just mentioned the German soldiers allow you to pick any house you want.

Excuse me. I meant Russian soldiers.

Oh, the Russian.

No, no, no. That's a mistake. The Russian soldier. I'm glad you corrected me. No, there were no Germans around. We had-- there were about seven of us girls that stuck together. My mother was the elder statesman who made decisions for us, who tried to lead us. We settled down in this apartment, where we found--

Incidentally, the landlady had remained there. And this was an apartment of an SS soldier. And when the Russian soldier brought us to this apartment, and ordered the woman to let us use the apartment, she refused and fought like a devil. But she had to give in.

It was an apartment with everything in it. Even there was even food stockpiled. We thought we were really in heaven. We could take a bath and put on some clean clothing. And we stayed there for a while until we felt our strength was coming back. And even our hair was growing back. We were becoming human beings.

But we had the desire to go back to our hometown. Transportation was none to be had. Railroad lines were bombed. Trains were-- it was a chaos. It was a natural war condition.

From Bromberg, we heard that in Kraków there was some kind of an agency, Jewish agency, that set up-- set up a home for refugees that were returning from the concentration camps. So we tried to reach Kraków.

We were advised from some local people in which direction to go. We would go from town to town. We arrived at some small village. And there we were told that in order to get to Kraków we would have to walk through a forest which was mined. So, what to do? How can we-- we certainly can't walk through a minefield.

But there was a man who was a guide who would lead us through. We carried with us-- we took some men's shirts and some fine linens that we bartered with. We bartered for-- money we didn't have. We offered him some men's shirts if he would lead us through the mined forest.

So he warned us. He warned us. He said, it's going to be very difficult. He says, first of all, it's freshly fallen snow. The mines are covered. He says even though I'm a guide, we're in great danger.

But he did agree to lead us through the forest. He led us through the forest. On the other side we reached another village where we found another Jewish family that was in hiding through the war. And they took us in. And we got some food and lodging there until we got directions to the next destination, how to get to Kraków.

From this point, we managed to get on some freight train that carried coal. We got on top of the coal. And that did take us into Kraków.

In Kraków, we found the agency. There was like a halfway house set up for refugees. It was-- conditions were not good. Were very bad. In fact, through the entire year that we worked in the-- in Bromberg, in the ammunition factory, we managed to stay clean. Here we picked up lice. Conditions were very bad.

We managed to go into the marketplace and barter again for some of the linens. We bought food. But here they registered everyone so that they could have a count or keep track of the survivors. And again, we wanted to find out what transportation was available.

Again, we managed to walk. We walked part of the time. Part of the time we traveled on these freight trains, on the coal freight trains. We managed to bring some blankets with us. And it was wintertime, February.

We traveled from one destination to another until there was a track we traveled. And then we had to get off again and either walk and catch another train, until we did reach the Slovak border, where the things were somewhat better, and there was better transportation.



We got onto a train there that took us straight to our hometown. It was-- by now, we were-- we had great anticipation in hopes of getting home. But we were afraid of what we would find and what we would not find.

We arrived at night. It was wintertime, freshly fallen snow. And we had-- we went straight to my grandmother's hotel, which was near the railroad station. We walked. There was no sign of any life. But there were some locked doors, and we were knocking on the doors. Unfortunately, there was no answer.

So we decided to go to our house, to our home. We walked. There were-- there was one other girl that came with us to our hometown. She was not from our hometown, but she stuck with us because we could speak the Slavic language, and we could communicate with the Polish people. She was from Hungary, so she came with us. And then she traveled from there.

When we got to our house, we found nothing but a shell of a house. All the windows were out. The doors were taken out. No furnishings, nothing left. The few wooden doors were even being burned by the Russian soldiers to keep warm.

So where can we go from here? We had a neighbor who had-- Mrs. Fitzler, who had a Jewish husband. She was of Russian origin. And we thought, well, we're going to see if she is still alive. She was an elderly lady.

We knocked on her door, and she was there. She answered the door. And she couldn't believe herself. She says, is it really you? Because her husband was also taken and never returned.

She was kind enough to take us in. And right away she fed us. And she wanted to give us beds. And we said, in all honesty, we don't want to contaminate your beds. We are not clean. But she insisted. She says, I don't care. I want you to sleep in a bed.

And she was telling us. She says, Mrs. Weisberger, your son-- your nephew Joe Krauss, is back. He's in town. And she said, oh my God, where is he? He says he lives in your grandmother's building. I says, we were there and nobody answered.

She says, well, we reluctantly answered because even the Russian soldiers tend to be rowdy, and they loot, and so we don't open the doors at night. But she says he is back.

In the morning, she went and got him. And it was my cousin Joe, who was also in the forced labor camp, who escaped from the labor camp and made his way home. Sometimes, in-- way before the war ended, he made his way back home, and he was a tailor, and he found some of my grandmother's belongings, and he established a tailor shop. And he was working for the local people.

And we were very fortunate to find him, because he already had a little house for him. And he took us in. And we cleansed our clothes. We boiled our clothes. And he brought some-- and he brought her food, and my mother started cooking.

And day by day there were people returning. There were about 35 survivors that came back to our town. Unfortunately, one day, one of our neighbors returned to tell us that my father died in Wells, Austria of typhoid fever in a hospital. So we have no reason or no hope to remain.

Another one of my cousins returned. And my cousin Joe. Some friends returned.

In the meantime, food was so scarce, and the trainloads of Russian soldiers returning to Russia from the war were-- demanded food so much that my cousin went into the neighboring villages and got eggs and potatoes.