

OK. So you and your mother went to--

Yeah. We decided we have to go to the ghetto. We have no other way. We don't have a place where to stay. And a person cannot live like a mouse. We have to wash. We have to dress. We have to feed. A person needs a lot. You really don't know how much a person needs till you get to the stage where we were.

So you take it for granted, you mean.

Yeah. We have to go to the ghetto. So we went to the ghetto. And we came in in the ghetto. No human imagination can imagine what a ghetto is. No. Filthy, sick, no food, no medicine-- people lived in a room, five, six families almost on top of each other, misery. Everything was really bad-- children laying in the streets and crying, children I knew the parents were taken away to Treblinka. I knew it.

And I couldn't help them. I didn't have myself what to eat-- begging for a piece of crumb, for a piece of clothing, naked in the streets. It was unbearable. It was just-- no person can imagine what this going to look like-- people laying and dying. The house where-- in the room where I was, a man was laying and dying slowly. I watched him, every minute, I seen him dying, and dying, and dying, and dying two days till he really died.

How did people get food? I mean, did the--

Just by smuggling. And it was a lot of killing. And they had to buy this. Was a lot of killing, but smuggling, going out from the ghetto.

The only way people could eat was to steal the food? There was no food that was coming in at all?

No, no, no food coming in at all. No food was reaching ghetto. Was no food coming in. I know, I was there from January till May, didn't get nothing, no food. I lived practically on nothing. Some Jews, what they had money, and they came in with money, or people where they lived there and the organized some food, they had that hidden food, so they eat.

When we came in the ghetto, I had a bread, me and my mother, a big Polish bread, about three-four pounds. We ate crumb by crumb this little piece of bread. We didn't let it go from our hands. It was really tough. And then we got sick on typhus. And I was laying and burning, maybe this temperature here is about 105-106. I was really burning up. My mother had it a little lighter because she had it in the First World War. So she didn't had it so bad. And I really had it bad. And that's all I lived is with a little water.

You had typhus?

Typhus, yeah. And that's all I had is a little water.

What did people do every day?

They took them out to work from the ghettos. They were going by columns, let's say, 20-30 in one group. They took them out in this group and they brought them back in the group. So those where they went out, they could catch a piece of food someplace. Or maybe a Nazi gave him a little crumb someplace.

Or those what they stayed in the ghetto, they really suffered. They didn't have anything. And those where they-- that's what their city like. If I would live in Radzyn, I would never die for hunger. I would have always had food. Now, when you transported in another place, and you don't the people, you don't know nobody, and you come without money, you come without anything, you don't have nothing.

So you didn't have any contacts?

No, no contacts, no nothing. Me and my mother, we didn't have no contacts. And we got sick on this typhus. And we were really sick. And then I got better. So we cooked for boys what they went out from the ghetto to eat-- to work. So when they came back, they used to bring a little flour, a few potatoes, and things like this. So my mother used to cook for them. So I ate with my mother. We used to get one portion, both of us, to eat from those boys.

So that's the way I start eating. Because till then, that's all I lived is on water and a crumb of bread what I still hold on like I never going to see it again. And then it was in May, May the 1st. They said, they're going to clear the ghetto again, going to take us all to Treblinka or Lublin, go to the gas chambers. We didn't know where we're going to go. And they start clearing the ghetto. So we went to hiding places. We went to a hiding place, me and my mother.

They were going to clear the ghetto?

They want to clear the ghetto to concentration camps or to gas chambers. They're going to take us.

And at that point, you knew about?

Oh, we knew, sure. At this point, we knew already what's coming. Before, we heard, and people told us, and we didn't believe it. And now, we believe it. We know, we're going to go. So I used to sit and talk to my mother. I said, listen. Life is life. We lived. We lived a life. Don't have the father. We don't have the brother. We don't have any relatives. Everybody's dead. So what is life to live for? And we have to suffer like this-- no food, in hiding, and any minute, they're knocking your door. A lot of nights, they used to come in and shoot a husband, shoot a wife, shoot a child, shoot, shoot, shoot.

In the ghetto?

Yeah, in a room, in a house. We used to run up to the attics and hide. I said, you know, Ma? It's better to be dead. I would feel much better to be dead. I can't take it no longer. I have nobody. I don't have-- my love is killed already. I don't have my relatives. I don't have nobody, just me and you suffering and suffering. For what's life to hold on for it? It's nothing.

My mother used to tell me, OK. I don't care about myself. I'm older. I lived. I know what it is. You young. You didn't start to live. I would give anything in the world, you should survive. You the only one should survive. Maybe Moshe is still alive in the Russian zone. You going to get together with them. I don't mind going to the gas chambers if I know you're going to be alive.

And I used to tell her, I'm going willingly with you. I don't care. See, my cousins wanted me to go. See, my cousins didn't come to the ghetto. My cousins wanted me to go with them, hiding in the woods, running around in the partisans or other places. I said, listen, I can't leave my mother alone. I'm going to go where my mother is, as much I love you and everything, I'm going with my mother. And that's what I did. I went with my mother.

To the concentration camp?

To the ghetto. Yeah.

Oh, to the ghetto. I see.

Yeah, to the ghetto. This was before going to the ghetto, my cousins said goodbye to me. And they want me to go with them. And I said, no, I'm going with my mother. So I said, Ma, we hiding. We want a hiding place. Any minute, they're going to come. They're going to discover us. And what's going to be is going to be. They're going to shoot us, they're going to shoot us. They going to take us to the gas chambers, they going to take us. We can't do nothing. We helpless, can't do nothing. They can do anything they want to us. We are their property. And that's the way it was. The days before, they took out some people from the hiding places not far from us. They heard terrible noises.

Was this--

Shouting with guns. They took them out from hiding places.

Was this before you went to the ghetto?

This is in the ghetto. This is in the ghetto.

This is in the ghetto. OK.

That's in the ghetto. In the ghetto, we used to have hiding places. Let's say they made a double wall. And we were in the wall. They made a double cellar in the wall-- in the cellar, hiding there. So they really couldn't get it there. Everything was double built. And they couldn't. No, they did. They did.

So a few days before they took out from the hiding place, they had a order to shoot on spot. And you take out from there, shoot on the spot. Don't take no Platz, no transportation, nothing. So that's what they did. They shot all the people they took it out.

And when they took us out, it was already the last day. That was 3 of May. We went, I think, the last day of Pesach. I don't know what was the last day, the last of April. Because I came to Majdanek the 4th of May. So the gendarmerie came in. They knocked out the wall. [GERMAN]. And with us was a little child. The mother used to hold the pillow over the mouth, he shouldn't breathe, the little baby.

The mother would?

Yeah, the mother used to hold the pillow. And she didn't suffocate the child.

Just so the baby wouldn't cry, you mean?

Yeah, cough, or cry, or breathe. The baby was maybe about two and a half years old. But the baby understood to be quiet because the Nazis going to shoot. So they came. And they took us out. There was another woman. And her little boy was about 13-- 12 or 13 years old. And they came, and took us out, beat us with the thing, and took us out.

We were there three or four days without food, without drinking, without nothing. And it was full of blood in the street. They told us to sit in the blood. So we sit down in the blood. I hold my mother's hand very tight, I squeeze it tight. And we were waiting for the shot of the gun.

Then they said, [GERMAN]. Stand up. So we stand up. They took us to the wall. They put us to the wall with the face to the wall. And we stayed like this to the face to the wall. The head goes boom, boom, boom, the heart. You hear everything knocking, everything is the last minute look. They didn't shoot. They didn't shoot. They said, OK. We're going to go to the Platz. So they took us to the Platz.

Even though they were-- what they-- weren't they ordered to shoot you?

No. This day was no order to shoot. It looks like they didn't shoot. They took everything-- when we came to the Platz, was already a lot of people there sitting in the Platz. And then we had to form fives in a row, five in a row, and walk to the trains. So we walk to the trains. I don't even remember how far the trains are there in this reach.

No, I know we walked. It was a lot of shooting during the walking. A lot of people fell a lot of people didn't have the strength. We were three, four days without food, laying there in those hiding places. We didn't have any strength. And we walked, and we walked. We walked to the trains. We came to the trains.

And the beating was-- I mean, I'm telling you, walking is walking-- a beating. It wasn't just walking, and the dogs, and the beating, and the shouting, and the blood running, and all those things. We came to the trains, and they pushed us into the trains, like cows with the yelling-- [GERMAN], and all those remarks what they have. Pushed us into the train like

cattles, almost one on top of the other, and shut down the trains tight.

And we stayed till all the trains were loaded. All the trains were loaded, the trains started moving. Were some young boys with us, and I said, we knew them. They watched where we going, if we go on to Lublin or we going to Treblinka. See, Treblinka is gas chambers, they gassing. Lublin is a-- they're going to take out the younger people.

Lublin's Majdanek.

Majdanek-- they're going to take out the younger people to work. And the older people, they're going to gas. We knew what everything. It's not like people coming out from other countries, they don't know what's going on. We knew what's going on. And we knew what's going to be. Now, still, the mind doesn't want to take it. So when we came to Majdanek, we were all around barbed wires.

Majdanek was in Poland?

Yeah, in Poland, Lublin. That was not far from our city. And we were sitting there, waiting. Then everybody stand up. And the SS men was going by and looking everybody over-- right, left, right, left. And so my mother was near me. And when he came close to her, this SS man, she said, [GERMAN].

Which means?

I'm young, I can work. She was 40-- 42 years old. She wants to work. He said, [GERMAN]-- one voice I hear from you again, I'm going to beat you to death, [GERMAN]. So that's all I heard of my mother. He gave her a throw away from my side, me on this side. And that's all I saw my mother. And that's all I heard about my mother.

So you went to the right side?

Yeah.

And your mother went to the left side?

My mother went to the left side. And when I came there to the shower and we showered, I was looking for my mother. I was looking for my mother every place. And that's it. I didn't see her. They gave us clothes, shabby clothes. It wasn't me. It was very cold day in Majdanek.

In May?

Terrible cold. Yeah, in May.

Did you want to say something?

No, I don't want to say that.

So we got those clothing. And they took us to the barracks.

Did you--

And we went the barracks there.

When-- were you aware when he said right, left, right, left of what that meant?

Yeah. I knew it's what-- yeah. Yeah. I was talking with my mother all the time. Even in the train, it was a sticky-- they were shooting in the train. A boy got shot in the train. See, this is a story six years to-- even how long I'm going to tell, I cannot tell the story, never. Never, I can tell everything what really happen. You just can't. I try to say.

Do you remember how long you were on the train before it reached Majdanek? Do you have any sort of recollection?

I really don't know. I think we were about all day there. And then we came in and then in the night. And we were--

In closed cars?

Yeah. And we were till the next morning. I know we stayed in one place for a longer time because was night. And they didn't want to take us out at night to wait for the morning. And everybody was screaming. It was stuffy, and was stinky, and was terrible. And many times, the door was open, people were jumping. A lot of people jumped from the train. I supposed to jump too now.

To try to escape, you mean?

Yeah, yeah. So I said to my mother, OK. I'm going to jump. If I have luck, they don't going to shoot me. And if I don't, they shoot me right there to death. And if I jump and I escape, well, I'm going to go where I'm going to go. Who's going to take me? I'm going to come back in concentration camp.

So what is there to running again? No. They have me, let them have me. Let them do with me what they want. That's all. I can't do nothing anyway. So I'm going to let them do anything they want with me. And that's the way it was.

We came thousands, and thousands, and thousands of people, children, small children crying. I lay at night, I hear the voices children crying, Ma, why you let me that the Germans should kill me? Why you let me by myself? See, the Germans used to grab the mothers on one side, the children on to the other side. And some went with the children. Some went with the children. Some left the children. It was a chaos.

What do you remember about your first day in the camp?

First day in the camp? Just awful, stripped from everything-- no belongings. Not a person no more, you're a animal. You're in their hands. You cannot go. You cannot run. I used to look out and see the Poles walking. I used to stay cry, just a plain walk where you want to walk, this was a luxury to us. We were under barbed wires with the Nazis always with the rifles, beating us and screaming at us. Here, I look down, see, it was just like here, looking down the street, look down, see the Poles with the little baskets under their arms, going shopping, running-- the children laughing, running.

So the Poles knew about the camps?

Yeah, the Poles knew. The Germans knew too. See, the Germans used to-- and that was another thing. The Germans used to say, oh, we didn't know this going on. We didn't know. The only thing-- the minute we got liberated, we didn't know what is going on. They was so pure. They didn't know. Now, came out another thing. It never happened. See? We should be used to it because we know what it is, how much it hurts. When they said they didn't know, people disappeared in the millions. Germany was so many Jews. Where they disappeared? Where are they? Intelligent Jews.

Well, that's one of the reasons why we do things like this, so that--

Yeah, that's why I'm doing that. It's not easy for me.

And I know that.

I'm doing it. I want generations to know and be-- and learn from this. With this my learn how to believe when somebody tells you something is bad coming. Believe it. Do something about it. Don't just hide your head and let your behind out.

If we would listen to the first signs, the first words, maybe we could find a place to go, to hide, to escape, and not to wait in all this little property. Let's say, my house now, somebody says, it's going to come, somebody going to kill out

all the Jews here. I leave this house just like it is. I don't care. I run. Then my mother, her property.

When you were in the camp, they put you in a bunk with women?

Yeah.

And what was that like? I mean, it was--

Yeah, it was a bunk with women, very little food, a lot of beating, Appells we had to stay.

Did they shave your head?

No, not Majdanek. No, Majdanek, they just cut somebody has long hair, they cut.

And how about this number that I see on your arm?

Then this is Auschwitz.

You got that number?

Yeah, shaved. I-- no, they just cut, cut hair if somebody has long hair. They cut it.

In Majdanek.

They didn't shave their heads, no.

So you went-- you came to Majdanek in May of 1943?

Yeah, 1943 in May, I came to Majdanek. And there I was till-- I think I was just two months in Majdanek. I'm not too sure-- two or three months in Majdanek. It seemed like I was maybe 30-40 years there. No, it was just three-four years. And we lived a lot through. We lived through hangings, and killings, and beatings, a lot of beatings. Everybody had blue marks. Everybody was beating. I had-- I was beating over the head with a rubber thing.

A rubber whip or something?

Yeah, rubber whip, I was beating. And till today, my head is here red.

Who, the German guards would beat you?

Yeah, the German guards, yeah, the German woman guards. There was women guards, not men guards, all women. And they beat us to death, to death, for nothing. We did everything they want. And we obeyed everything. We were nothing against. But still, we got beaten. It was one day, we called a cow, one we called a mother, like a mother, a matke, you know, big one. They beat us to death till it came the transport. Yeah, and the Appells.

Were there just Jews in the camp?

It was some Poles, not much. Poles, they were politicians or something like that, bit of--

Political prisoners?

Political prisoners, yeah, or gangsters, or--

Gypsies?

--stealers. In Majdanek, I didn't see so many Gypsies, no. I didn't come across too much Gypsies in Majdanek, no. In Auschwitz, I saw a lot of Gypsies.

Majdanek was a lot of prisoners.

Yeah, prisoners was in Majdanek.

Would you tell me a little bit about the daily routine in the camp?

In Majdanek.

In Majdanek.

We used to drag stones, carry stones from one place to the other, sand from one place to the other.

Was there a point to the work?

It didn't make no sense, no, not to me. Not to me. When I got beaten, I was between the barbed wire. See, here was barbed wire, here was barbed wire. In the middle was empty and some weeds were growing there-- not beautiful grass, weeds, who knows what. So they chased us on the-- all in. It was one opening, where you open up to go in. So between-- I used to take out the weeds.

So I did a very nice piece of weeds there. I did it fleissig. I didn't want to get beaten by the Nazis. So I worked. I sit there. Instead of sitting, I worked. So everybody did work very nicely. No, she just had the ambition to hit everybody over the head. So a girl near me, she split her head in half. And blood was running all over, blood. So she said to me, you see what I did there? If one voice is going to come out from your mouth, you're going to get the same thing. So she gave me one big [? bang ?] on my head. And I put my teeth with my lips together.

You bit your mouth.

I bit my mouth. I bit my mouth. And I hold my teeth together and my everything together not to scream. And I didn't scream, but she gave me one more. She gave me two, even I didn't scream. And she went further and did the same thing. It was a--

She was German?

Yeah, yeah, she was German.

It was not work.

What was her name? Do you remember her name?

Yeah, do we know her name? Do we ever could look up at them to see her face? See, people say now the names, the faces. We didn't. We didn't. They were like gods, like who knows. They were so high up us. We were just like little snakes. We couldn't even-- we didn't know the names. We didn't know the faces, even, mind the names. That's the way it was. We were prisoners. We were nothing. We were just there to beat us. And work, they didn't do no work. I mean, I worked. Maybe other people worked in different places. Where I worked, was senseless work. Was a lot of beating and senseless work. And we were cold. And we were hungry. And we were--

The camp was already all set up?

Yeah, it was all set up. Yeah, was set up a camp.

In other words, it was all totally built by the time you got there.

Yeah, totally built with barracks and everything. Yeah.

Do you remember how big the camp was? It was pretty big. I mean, to my imagination then, as far I could see, I saw the camp, and I see the civilian side like this side. See the camp and the civilian side. Civilian side meaning where the Poles were.

Yeah, where the Poles live, not in camp, where they were free.

Would you tell me a little bit about your living conditions, like the food, the clothing, sanitary conditions, situation, stuff like that?

Yeah, the living conditions was like this. They gave us clothes that didn't fit us. They gave us shoes, didn't fit us, torn shoes. Mostly, we got the wooden shoes, couldn't walk in them, big ones, wooden big shoes. And the clothes were very shabby, torn, shabby.

Because the good clothes, they used to take to Germany to their people. They used to give us rags. So when we were staying in the Appells, we used to stay four, used to hold each other. The one would stay in the front or the back was frozen to death. So we used to change around the front and the back to warm us. And the Appells were very long. They used to hold us hours and hours.

The what?

The Appell. How you call it?

Roll call?

Roll calls, yeah, roll calls. We used to stay hours and hours. And if somebody escaped--

How often did they have these roll calls?

In the morning and the night, and sometime during the day. And sometimes, somebody escaped, we used to stay till they got them back and they hanged them. And then we had to stay and watch hanging. And then they hanged for days and days. And go by and you see this hanging. It was really bad. So when they took us to the transport to Auschwitz, I was going with the first transport. I always were in the first. I don't know what it is.

Really?

Yeah.

I just wanted to ask a little bit more about Majdanek. How about food?

The food, they give us very little food, very little-- plain water. And you could fish for potato, I don't know, or found it.

So it was like a soup or something?

Yeah, some soup cooked. Yeah.

Must have been grass.

Grass?

Must be grass. In Auschwitz, mostly, I ate grass. I don't know. I really don't remember. I know, we were hungry. We were always hungry. And no food came in. See, in the other lagers, we could a little bit organize a little food. No, not in



Majdanek, no, no nothing, just what they gave us. That's what we ate. And they gave us a little piece of bread, one little piece of bread. So one used to steal from the other. And the beating at the blocks were terrible.

What happened when people got sick?

If people got sick, they took them to the crematorium. That's one thing. No sickness there, was no places where to go.

Did Majdanek have a crematorium?

Yeah. Yeah, my mother was gassed in Majdanek. Yeah. It wasn't on the bigger scale. It was a crematorium. Yeah.

And people knew that the crematorium was there.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Did you have--

It was more when people came to go to work, where to burn. No, people where there were over 30, like 36-37 very seldom had the chance to go to the concentration camp-- to the working camp. They mostly went to the crematoriums. And children, children under 16, they all went to the crematoriums.

Did you ever have any opportunity to have any contact with the men in the concentration camp?

No, not in--

In Majdanek?

--not in Majdanek. No. Majdanek, my cousin was there. He died there, I think, from beating. No, no contact, not even over the wires, and not even when we went to work. We couldn't because those Nazis where they watched us, the women, they were just bad. They were so bad, it's unbelievable bad. Yeah. When we came to Auschwitz, they couldn't get over. We all were black, all behinds were black from beating.

So it wasn't just even one woman, it was a lot of them there.

Yeah, all of them, all of them, all of them what they took care of the camp. It mostly was women. The men didn't take care in this camp.

They sound like pretty sadistic.

Sadistic, yeah, very sadistic, right.

Were there kapos in Majdanek? Do you remember?

Not in mine, no. Not-- I was on the lager. Maybe those where they went out from the inside, maybe when they work on fields or other places.

I see. You worked inside.

Yeah. I was-- in Majdanek, I never went out from there. No, I worked inside. So I didn't have a kapo. I just have a Stubenalteste there for the barrack, but not no kapo there for me. I don't know, other maybe had when they went to work some other places.

I was going to ask if there were any attempts at resistance. But you did mention that some people did try to escape.

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Because see, Lublin-- I mean, we lived around there. And a lot of people lived right near Lublin, where they in the camps. And they knew all the places. And they tried to escape. A lot of tried to escape.

Did they often succeed?

Not many times, no, not many times. Like I told you, if they succeed, they were brought back in a month or two months later anyway. Nobody really escaped to escape. I don't believe it.

We were talking about resistance.

And in one word, I can tell you. I was very glad to leave Majdanek, very glad.

It was a hard camp.

Very hard camp. And the minute they said, it's going to go out transport, I really didn't care where because I didn't know where it's going to go. It could even go to gas chambers. I really didn't care. My mother wasn't there. And I really cried for my mother. I cried a lot, almost every night. I used to lay and cry, Mother, Mother. And then I really-- sometime, I really gave up.

I said, any place-- this was really bad. I mean the Nazi woman used to walk around in camp and any time she want to beat and kill, she could do it. I know, she didn't have to have no orders to do things. She did it on her own. So I really talked to the girls from my city, asked some other girls, I said, listen, a transport going to come, I don't care where it's going to come.

These were--

I'm going to go.

--girls in camp with you?

Yeah, they were in camp with me.

Did you talk much to the other people in the camps, the other prisoners, the other countries?

In other cities?

Well, people that you shared--

Oh, yeah, we talked.

Did you feel comfortable talking with-- I mean, was there any fear?

No, I wasn't afraid. What, are you going to go to Nazis and tell them what I'm saying? No, no, no. Was no fear.

What did you talk about?

We talked-- mostly, we talked about food. We talked about food a lot.

It's interesting that of all the people I've interviewed, everyone says that, that you talked a lot about food.

Yeah, they do? Yeah, about food. And the bread-- bread was such a thing. This was like a dream. When you going to have a loaf of bread, you going to hold in your hand a loaf of bread, this was the biggest dream. And then after this, I don't care, you going to get killed, what's going to happen. I want to have a whole loaf of bread and eat. And that's the dream. And then we were talking, the cooking, the traditions in the house, parents-- talk a lot about parents, brothers,

mother, and fathers.

You cried a lot together?

Cried a lot together. Yeah, cried a lot together. We talk with people from our city, we talk with people from other cities. I was with Warsaw with girls. And they knew some of my family. In Warsaw, they were very rich people.

Did you-- was there any kind of religious activity that went on in the camps?

Religious activities-- when came Pesach, we didn't have no matzos.

I know that. But I mean like, were you aware?

Yeah, we were aware sometimes. We were not aware even of days. We didn't know if the day's Monday or Tuesday. Just Sunday, we didn't go to work. Sundays, we-- in the blocks, washed, we combed, and we did things for ourselves. Sunday, we didn't work because the Nazis didn't want to go out to work Sunday. So we didn't work, we knew it's Sunday. Now, sometimes, sometimes, we knew, it's a holiday. I don't know about feelings or something, by Yom Kippur.

Look, my father, my brother, my other cousins were killed. I didn't know the date. And in concentration camp, it went into my mind this day, October 27. And when I was liberated, I wrote to the Poles to tell me the date. And they wrote me the date. They wrote me the date, exactly the same date.

So we had feelings. I mean, this time of the year with Shavuos and the rest, I mean, the holidays, we used to sit and talk a lot about the holidays. OK, we couldn't go and pray, but we talked and how was a holiday in the house, how the children react. And how Shabbos was, with the gefilte fish, and cholent, and all those things. We talked a lot. We talked about not surviving. We talked a lot.

OK. OK. So you decided to become-- to go on one of the first transports to leave Majdanek.

Yes, yes, the first transport they're going to announce, I'm there. I don't care where I'm going to go. I'm going to go. And that's the way it was. They wanted girls to come to this block. We're going to go for transport. So I went. I went. And we came-- we went by railroad. We went and went. I don't know how many days. I don't know anything about this, how far from Majdanek to Auschwitz, this I don't know.

Did you know were going to Auschwitz?

No, I didn't know. We came to Auschwitz. They took us-- then it wasn't the train going in like later years. We had to walk. And then they took us by big--

Wagons?

--wagons, yeah, you know, the army kind what put up the soldiers.

Yes.

They took us to Auschwitz-- Majdanek, I said-- to Birkenau, to Auschwitz. Auschwitz was really in the city. This was Birkenau, called Birkenau. So they took us there. And when we came there, we came in, it was a beautiful-- they call it [NON-ENGLISH]-- how you call it there-- like a big arch.

A big arch, yes. Arbeit macht das leben sÃ¼ss written.

Work--

Work makes life--

Free.

--free-- sweet, macht das leben sÃ¼ss.

[GERMAN]

And an orchestra was sitting, orchestra in the side. Everybody was dressed in white blouses with dark skirts, like navy or black skirts, with nice kerchiefs on the heads. They looked so beautiful. It looked to me like it's a resort place. We came. And we came in with those trucks. We came all in a big, long highway going in-- this side, concentration camp, this side-- and the houses looked beautiful too. It looked like little brick houses, nice ones-- I mean, comparatively where it was in Majdanek, little black-- little block houses. And there, the houses was-- what the people standing on the-- how you call it?

Podium?

I say Appell. I mean, but the counting, when they have to be counted out.

Oh, the roll call.

The roll call, yeah, I forget this. They were standing on the roll call. Some were dressed in red kerchiefs, some in blue, and some in white. Everything looks so beautiful. And the Blockovas, the Altestes in the blocks look nice too. Every-- we looked, we said, look at him. They took us in in a resort place. It's really gorgeous here.

I was admiring. I never saw anything like it in my life-- clean, everything so clean, everything so nice. So they took us to the zone, where we're going to have shower. And we have to shower and change our clothes, give away those schmattas. And they're going to give us other clothes. So when we came in there and they cut off our hair, we couldn't recognize each other right away.

You were bald.

Yeah, Bald and then they gave us clothes, schmatta clothes too. We came then 3,000 girls, we came in-- 3,000 girls. So they give us such a schmatta clothes. And they took us to a barrack. And we were fighting for this little place to get in in this bunker. We were fighting.

It wasn't the same. It didn't look so nice outside. It was a different kind of bigger block. This is a quarantine, they call it, or something, probably. And everything, we had to fight for it-- for the space, we had to fight, and for everything, fight. And it seemed entirely different.

And the Blockalteste came in right away. And she said to us, [GERMAN]. We dirty pigs. And we these [GERMAN]. Polish swines, they call us. We're not Polish, we Jewish. The Jewish have a place. All of a sudden, we become Polish here? Polish swines-- she was from Czechia, Czechoslovakian.

And they were before us-- they were already better people there in this concentration camp. So they throw us in in those barracks. And all night, we didn't sleep. One slept on the other. We fight, fight. OK. The next day came another Blockalteste. And they separated us. They took us to other blocks, were four on one bed, on a bunk, four was laying on the bunk, and was three high the bunks.

And was a little bit better. And they took us to a Kommando. It was called [GERMAN] Kommando. It was going a lot of girls there, in the thousands, in the thousands. I think our Kommando, what we came out, it was 3,000. It was more than other-- I don't know. It was a lot of people. And then men was working there too. And you know what we did? We digged. We digged ditches. And we built railroads that-- we carried big stones. We carried-- and what is [NON-ENGLISH], those things-- tracks.

Railroad tracks?

Yeah, we carried railroad tracks.

In terms of your work that you did every day?

Yeah, yeah, the work, did everything.

When did you have your number put on your arm?

Oh, yeah, this when we came. They put on the number. Was very painful.

Now, your number is 47404?

Yeah. And then this is Jewish.

Underneath is a star.

A star. A half a star, that's Jewish. The other people didn't have this, just numbers. And the Jewish people, they gave this thing.

A star.

A star, yeah. They put on the numbers on us.

Had green stars, was-- forget what it was, was for the gangsters. Poles had just the triangle. We had to take the star.

You had the star? So the Jews had a Star of David? And political prisoners or Poles just had--

Green.

--the green?

Yeah, the political prisoners had green, and the gangsters had black, the thieves had black. They had different kind of styles for different kind of people what they were there for something. I wasn't there-- I was there because I'm Jewish. But other people did things. And they came there.

So you were in Birkenau?

So I was in Birkenau. And I was going out to this commander every single morning and come back every single night, beaten, hungry. They gave two people a big shissel, they call it, a pot.

A pot?

Yeah, a red one, a big one. And they gave you a little bit water. And it was cooked with some weeds. They call it poison ivy. They call it [POLISH] in our language, in Polish.

Poison ivy?

Yeah.

You would eat poison ivy?

That's right, poison ivy. You had to-- you have to grab it in one way not to get poison.

What would happen if you would eat it? It wouldn't hurt you?

They cooked us. They cooked it. They cooked it and that's what we ate. They stopped the periods. We didn't have no periods during all the concentration.

How did they stop your periods? They gave you--

By giving us things.

--shots?

No, in the food was something, putting in some chemical. They didn't have the periods all the time I was in concentration camp. I didn't have it. And we were going to Entlausungs. They used to Entlaus us. We shouldn't have any lice.

Delouse you.

Delouse you. So they had to put in all the clothes in a bucket of green water. And then they gave a-- throw the water and you.

Do you want me a stop this? OK. So what kind of work did you do in Auschwitz and when you were in Birkenau?

Yeah, that's the work we did. We built the railroad, it should go from the station-- from the railroad station to the crematorium. We built this whole railroad. And the people shouldn't have to walk. Or they should transport them by trucks. So the railroad came right into the crematorium. That's what it was. That's what we built, all those railroads. And they worked. And the men worked so hard. They were beating the men. The men hardly could walk.

Did men and women work together?

No, no. They worked separately. We could see them. We could see them not far. The men were with other posts. And we were with other posts. The German Nazis staying over us.

Did you have kapos there?

Yeah, yeah, there we have kapos, Anweisers.

And they were Jewish guards?

No, my kapos were not Jewish. My kapo were German kapos. They were prostitutes. That's why they were there.

These, again, were women guards?

Yeah, women.

Women prisoners had women guards. And men had men guards?

Yeah, men guards--

And that was the it always was?

--for the prisoners, Yeah. No, the Gestapo was men. This time, the Gestapo was men, not women. And the men was guarding us. So I was going to this Kommando for a while, day in and day out, working hard, and beating, and no food.

We made noise, they stopped the food. They didn't give us food all day. We had to work without food. Can you imagine 3,000 people with everybody has one shissel, three a person or two to a person, and everybody hungry, how they eating without noise? Can you imagine this?

Oh, you couldn't eat with noise.

With the noise.

You couldn't make noise.

Yeah, we should eat quiet, not talk, not eat. I mean, listen, 3,000 people, you have to hear some noise. So the kapo said, no food. She throw it out in our eyes. She throw it out on the ground all the food, giving us no food. So I said to myself, this Kommando, if I'm going to go on, I'm not going to survive too long if I really want to survive. So it came in a German woman.

And she said, I mean, from the concentration camp, there was SS women too in the concentration camp, not just men. And she said, she need-- she came with a kapo. And she said she need 120 girls for a Kommando to work every day outside of the concentration camp, in the fields, to go on the fields-- 120 girls to take out from this block? It has to be a lot of head split.

And it was a lot of head splits. The kapo was fighting, and the Blockalteste was killing, and everybody were killing the girls. Everybody wants to go to this kapo to work for-- 120 is better to work for 3,000. So and I was staying there. And I was just hoping. I was afraid to run through this whole mess. And the kapo called me over. [GERMAN]. Come on, small one.

So I went over. And she took me, she said, you better come tomorrow. I said, I'm afraid, I'm going to get in. And you'll be here. And she took another one from my city what I was together with her. And she lives in Chicago, so two of us.

And we used to go out. Yeah, in the morning, when comes-- we had to stay in fives for this Kommando. 120 girls, was a lot of beating again, the same thing, till it went a few weeks till we really went organized. That's the girls. And that's the girls. Otherwise, the other girls wanted to come in because they knew it's a good Kommando. See, we went out. We had those kind of what I just told you, the ivy.

Poison ivy.

The poison ivy.

Yes. You would cut the plants.

In baskets, in baskets without gloves, without gloves in those baskets. And we bring them to the concentration camp. And then they cook it.

And that was your job?

And that's a soup, yeah. And that was our job, the 120 girls. So the poison ivy grows in places where apple trees grows, where other things grows to eat. So if we couldn't bring it into the concentration camp, at least we could eat. I mean, what was there to eat? We throw them in the mouth, and we ate. A lot of times we got beaten from this kapo. She used to kill us if she find we eat something and we grab something.

So we had to do-- she shouldn't see it. So we had a apple, a rotten apple fall down from the tree. Or we had other things what we could eat, so we ate during the day when we really weren't so hungry when we came home and back to the concentration camp.

So we were going out for a while to this Kommando. And everything was fine. And that's the everyday life was. And

sometime, I snatch apple. I throw it in my-- hide it between my clothes. And I bring it into the other girls, my girls what I knew, what I slept with them. I want to give them something too. And then came another kapo to this block. And she said, she needs 16 girls-- 16. And I want to be between the 16. I want to be. I didn't want to go out no more to this thing. I taste already the good stuff.

You got spoiled now.

I got spoiled. And I don't want to suffer now. I want to eat. And I want to trade a apple for a pair shoes. I want to trade something to eat and to live a little bit better. So I tried to go in in this Kommando. And I did go in. It wasn't easy. And I did go in. And she took in this girl what she was with me too, what she's now in Chicago. She's in four years, five years younger than me, very nice girl, very intelligent. And we were going out, 15 girls, a kapo, and a post. And we had it marvelous, we had it.

What would you do?

We-- they worked on the Wisla. You know the Vistula, Wisla, the water that goes to the Bug?

Which goes to the brook. What would you do?

To the big Bug, to the big water. We used to cut the vine, the things to make baskets, make baskets.

You would cut vines.

Yeah, we would cut those vines, and put them in bushels, and leave them there. The trucks came and pick them up. And we came every morning. And every night, we go back there, working by the Vistula, by the Wisla. A lot of little boats came. The Poles came. And they saw us. So they brought us some kielbasa. They brought a piece of bread. So we took out from the concentration camp a sweater, pair of nylon stockings, other things. We gave them, they gave us. And we traded back and forth.

This was without the guard's knowledge?

No, the guard knew it. He was a very good guard. This guard was specially a good-- he wasn't good for Jewish people. He could kill on the spot every Jew. No, to us girls, we were selected 15 girls and the Anweiser was the 16th. And he was in love with the Anweiser, the German woman. He was in love.

And we had a marvelous place there. We ate. And we drank. And we did everything marvelous. And we weren't under pressure. We worked nice. I used to wear nice boots, nylon stockings, a nice striped suit made nice, not smutty. And I had it not bad. No, people had it very bad there. They had it very bad. No, I-- just luckily, I didn't have. I used to bring some bread in in the lager and gave the other girls sometime to eat and help them out.

And the concentration camp was still bad, was a lot of killing. One time, I went out to another Kommando and girls were shot right on the spot by working, working hard. Then this came to end of. This came to a end. We went in in a Strafkommando because we organized too much. We had a few women where they want to get too much to bring in in the lager. They had sisters. They had sisters in concentration camp. So we went in the Kommando. And we went to Straf work. We had to work very hard. For six months, they gave us, in concentration camp, a jail.

You mean they punished you--

They punished me.

--because they felt like you were taking advantage?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. We ate. They took advantage. It's a good thing that they didn't take us to the crematorium for this because they could, but didn't. And this end. And I worked very hard under a lot of pressure, working in the day to the



night. We used to work in fields where used to grow grass. We had to chop this grass, and take out the grass, and make it soil, clean soil. And was really hard. I still have it there-- I used to have big--

Blisters?

--blister and calluses.

Warts, that's right.

--calluses, I used to-- I still have it. And then start-- they start taking out Poles, they start taking out from the concentration camp. So I said to the girls what I was with them, I said, they're taking out Poles. They're going to leave all the Jews. And probably, the Russians are coming here. And they're going to gas us out in the big crematoriums. That's what's going to be the end. Meanwhile, it was an uprising in the concentration camp. And the wires were all cut. And the--

Who did that?

--the voices-- the one where they organized, the people from the concentration camp, where they work in the Sonderkommando, where they work in the gas chambers.

And these were Jews?

Yeah, Jews.

They tried a resistance?

Resistance, yeah, yeah. They had probably outside-- they were promised, probably, the outside help going to come. And they never did come. They opened the wires. And they stopped the electricity. And they were yelling, girls, run, run, run, run, run, run, run out from the camp. I said, I'm not running no place. I'm staying right here.

If I get killed, I get killed right here. I have no place to run. And I have nobody to run. I mean, nobody is around to whom I'm going to run. A lot of my friends, my girls what I knew, I knew them very well, they run out. And they all got killed, all of them. And the gendarmerie came, and the SS came, and ah, the concentration camp was full of armies, soldiers.

When was this around?

This was '44, '44, before they evacuated Auschwitz, before going out from Auschwitz, before they took the first transport Jews out. Till then they took Poles out. So that's what I'm just saying.

Right, right.

No Jews transport was leaving Auschwitz yet. And this was the uprising. And then they said, we're going to take Jews to transport. I said, I'm going I'm going. And always, I was the first on the transport. And I'm going. And other girls didn't go. My friends, they didn't go. And I went. Yeah.

And at night, I had a dream. My mother came to me-- the first time and the only time my mother came to me. And she said, you're going to be in the last wagon in the transport in the last. Now, when you're going to come to the place, you're going to be in the first. And the wagon is going to be open. They're not going to be closed. If you want to escape, you could escape.

No, don't escape. Don't. Stay there. You did it so far so good. Stay. I don't know if it would be mind doing or my mother was there talking to me. And she said, just do the way you're doing. And you're going to live. You're going to live. And that's what I did. In the morning, I woke up, I said to the girls, listen to this, I had a dream. My mother came to me.

That's the only first time my mother came to me. She said that I'm going to be taken by this-- the--

Transport.

--transport. And I shouldn't worry. I been in the the first train by going-- no, in the last by going, and the first when I arrive there to the place, destination. I be the first. And the wagon's going to be open. And I shouldn't try to escape. And I should just try to survive.

So I told the girls, they were laughing. They said, what transport? Jewish transport didn't go yet. And who knows if they going to take me. And usually, I used to go out from the concentration camp to work. But this day, I didn't go out. I don't know. I felt so upset. I said to the Stubenalteste, I said, I'm going to the dentist. See, there was places. If you have a toothache or other pain, they took you in. And if you were really sick, they took you in and then they took you to the crematorium-- but was [YIDDISH] there.

Yes.

Yeah. And they used to empty them so often-- every few weeks, every few days, who knows? When they didn't have too much people to burn, so they empty out the [YIDDISH]. So I said, I'm going to the dentist there to take. And I didn't go out from the concentration camp to work. I stayed in the concentration camp. And that's what it was, the transport. They start the transport. And I was taken. And I and I was going. And I was happy to go.

So had you gone to work that day, you wouldn't have been on that transport?

No. When I would go to work, no, I wouldn't be. No, they just took those where they were on the camp, only those. So they-- it was like this. I was on the last train. I was on the last. And when the train moved a little further away, all the doors were open.

And that's the way it was. All the doors were open. The post was sitting. A few times, the train stopped in the woods. And they told us, if we want to go out, we can go out, stretch out, and do things, to go to the bathroom, which we did. We came back on the train. And we went on the train.

We came to Bergen-Belsen. I didn't know such a thing exist. We came there, it was no barracks, no barracks. They were just sitting, playing on the open field with no barracks. They made little tents. And were there a few days in those tents till a big storm came, a very big storm, like hell from heaven. And they throw all the tents fly away. And we were sitting right there in the water. So then they took us to barrack. They empty out the barracks from the soldiers.

Where was Bergen-Belsen? Bergen-Belsen was in Germany. It's in the English zone, the English, not in the American zone. It's in the English side. And there was something too.

When-- do you remember around when this was that you went there?

Yeah, it was like in August time. I know--

1944?

1944, yeah, yeah, by this time. And then came other transports, came-- Esther came, and other my friends what I knew. So we said, why did you come here? It's such a terrible camp-- no food, no work, nothing, just sitting and waiting for the death, dying, dying, nothing. They don't give you any work. And they didn't give you any food. They didn't have anything. It was really bad.

They couldn't bring over any food. They used to cook a little water with a little flour, just to mix around, not even cook the water and the flour, just like it came up like a foam. And that's what they used to feed us. And everybody had diarrhea. Everybody was dying on diarrhea-- and piles of people were up to high up. It was no place to burn. They didn't have any crematoriums to burn.

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