

All tape's rolling. OK. We'll cue you then. And watch for Jim's fingers. OK? Oops! Sorry about that. Five, four, three, two, one.

Please ask me the question.

My name is Stanley Garfinkel. I'm continuing to interview Mrs. Freda Schmelzer for the Holocaust Archive Project sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland chapter. Mrs. Schmelzer, when we last spoke, you were just beginning to explain the ghettoization that took place after you were taken to the town of Soluge.

Yes.

I wonder if you would continue to tell us about that.

So I am going to continue. We left at the putting us, jamming us, in the synagogue. It was a mess. I don't know how many hundred, or maybe thousand, from that convoy we came, that-- not only from Terebes, from the surrounding of Soluge. When we were coming, we still-- we didn't know there will be a ghetto for us, waiting for us, a ghetto. But now we saw already something wrong, very serious, because we met people outside their houses-- I imagine, Jewish people-- crying, behind their homes. They were ready to leave also.

I know those villages by name, all of them. But why we were going-- they start from Terebes. Then they went to [NON-ENGLISH], then further and further. The borders were open already. We were Hungarians not Czechs and not Romanians. We were all Hungarians.

And we were escorted. So we were sitting on those wagons-- I didn't tell you about that-- sitting eight or 10. We didn't feel our joints. Mute-- nobody dared to ask one question-- why? Where?

There was no answer for us. We were afraid to talk anymore, because the man who was with us and the police and everything. So we were frozen already.

So we arrived in Soluge. And like I told you, we went in that temple, with baggage, packages, and all what we had-- not too much already. But everybody had something-- and especially the family. It was terrible to see-- grandmother suffering, father suffering, mothers seeing their children, their daughters, together.

My oldest sister lost her husband already, and she moved in with us. And we considered her lucky, because she didn't have her baby. She died, before. Her father never saw her and so on.

So we were there in the temple for a night. It was not possible for anyone to sleep, because of the moaning of the sick-- crying, the babies. And there was no place for us to move. We were, all night, in standing position.

We were happy if we let the sick, at least sick, sit, not sleep. They were sitting. They were lucky to sit a little bit.

And so, in the morning, they emptied the temple, and they start to locate us in different-- in every house which was within the ghetto area. You know? So 20, or maybe more, in one room. And no bed. The beds or furniture had to be emptied from those places, we should have place.

We were not even hungry. We didn't sleep, all night. We didn't eat, yesterday. We didn't eat, today. We forgot about eating already. Who wanted to eat?

And there was no possibility for to wash ourselves. There were young boys, men, older men, in that place, and young girls. And I don't know--

They always came. There was the girl in that place-- you know, my aunt's house, I told you-- fell in in the ghetto. And those people who rented her house, they had a 23-year-old girl. Her name was [NON-ENGLISH].

And they put her in charge with everything in the house. That's what they did. They put one person as supervisor. In Hungarian, I know how [HUNGARIAN], if somebody will listen to me. I know you understand.

And she was notified about their laws. We have to cut our hair down to short, the men had to cut their beards down, and so on-- what we are allowed, not allowed, to do. But it wasn't worth what we are allowed to do. Everyone who would try to go in the city or get out from that ghetto would be shot. And you hear that every single day.

We went out, you know, girls and young boys. What can we do? Sit in the house? We didn't have place.

And there was a big backyard, like, and from both sides, two streets in between. So we have place in the [NON-ENGLISH] to walk around there and talk what is going to happen with us. But we still hope we're going to go back home.

It was like this for four weeks. And we never gave up hope. We're going to go home. Where are they going to take us?

And it went on for four weeks, doing nothing. They didn't take us to do something there. They took us for--

They took Soluge for a transition place-- between Soluge and Auschwitz. We find out that later.

So after four weeks, one Friday morning we got one word. We're going to go away. Everybody has to--

They didn't give the order, like last night. Everything had to be done in the morning. Right-- you have to be ready within an hour and go out in the [INAUDIBLE] garden. That's what we did. We got-- but how much we had? Nothing.

I have an uncle there, lived in that place, an 83-year-old. He was a-- vinegar-- he had a vinegar factory in Soluge-- very well-to-do man and 80-- also 83-year-old wife. He started to pick up a big [HUNGARIAN]-- you know.

Quilt.

The quilt, the Hungarian, you know, with feather.

A feather quilt, yes.

--and schlepping after his wife, because he was covering her always on the floor. They were sitting on the floor. And also my cousins, his children and grandchildren, they were lucky to stay at home. They were not taken for-- in the work camp, so they were lucky to come in the ghetto.

And he was walking with that quilt. And one Hungarian gendarme, with a black feather-- they wore a black hat and black feather-- very, very shtolts people. And he says, put that down.

And he start explaining, his wife is sick. So he took his arm, and he gave him a push, a good push, for the old man. He put the [HUNGARIAN] right the way down.

So we went out. And I saw-- and everybody-- the singles of the homes are lifted up, and machine guns are directed toward us. And I know we were standing with my husband. My father recognized our cousin and his father. And he was an electrician, an electrical engineer, and he says, he has poison. He will kill himself.

And I told him not to, but I think he did. A lot of people did. They find out already what's what.

So they came out, some gestapos already, and they start asking us names. [SPEAKING GERMAN]? I says, "Ich bin Freda Israel." "Du bist Sara."

Every Jewish girl got a new name. You didn't have your name anymore. You are Sara. Sara.

So they went to my sister and my mother and everybody and they told him, you are Sara. And the boys got the name [NON-ENGLISH].

And so we should put everything down. I told about the experience. People were called in to give jewelry-- where are they money-- where are their money-- before that week. They should give it to the authorities, because they cannot use their valuables anymore.

They have to give everything except their wedding band. So they did. And because the wedding bands was left to the Germans already, you know? They have to give something for the Germans. So that was done,

Everybody had to stand up, to funf, in [NON-ENGLISH]-- in rows-- five, hand on the shoulder-- your hands on-- always in the first shoulder. And we marched on, very fast, very fast. It took time until everybody came out from their house. And everybody looked to keep close to their families. My mother had her four daughters, and we were lucky to stay together. We didn't need a strange five. And cousins also together.

And the word went on-- always hold onto your hands. God forbid, nobody should lose any sister or brother or daughter or whoever. So we going. We had to throw--

There was an order-- throw down everything except your clothing-- no pictures, no papers, you know, official papers, or-- everything. We were walking out from the ghetto.

And while we were walking, we recognized pictures. We're walking on the pictures of our family members and friends. So here is [NON-ENGLISH]. Oh, here is Olga Klein, on the-- and therefore, we were walking like this. The floor outside, you know-- everything was, all over, pictures.

So we arrived to the place. We started. We're going someplace. The cattle wagon was ready for us and open. And there was a little straw on the bottom. And they told us we should help our elders.

Oh-- then we couldn't keep up anymore. The only thing-- we were numbers-- 75 in one cattle wagon. And Schneller. Schneller. You know? Well, had to go very fast.

So, around 4 o'clock, I guess, we were in the wagon. They throw a couple of loaf of breads, round bread-- two-- three or something.

They gave us some kind of dish-- you know, pails. We had to go someplace. Cattle wagons doesn't have--

Bathrooms.

--bathrooms. And what we did-- we separate one section with a white sheet. Somebody put a white sheet and every-- we start going. We reached Kassa-- Hungarian or Hungarian city that they had the check had him had that beautiful city in the Tatra Mountains. And then the Hungarian took it over. That was the granica between Poland or-- you know, it's--

It's all close together, there.

Then we saw-- we left Kassa. We entered in Poland. Then we're going in Germany. We thought so.

But I tell you, we didn't talk. There's 75 people-- young, 19-year-old boys, or 16 or 17-- young girls, our parents, our relatives-- people from home. And we just sit there.

There was no place where to-- you just put yourself down and rest up a little bit, to think-- nothing. And the night came.

Meanwhile, a big whistle, when we start going-- a long whistle. That whistle I could hear always in my life-- a whistle, when we start going.

And we traveled all night. And you are not allowed to talk, because you don't know-- you don't know who he is-- what you have there. You just sit there and-- without words how you feel. Rest up. Put your head here, for my parents or some sick people. Some of them died, while going there, with lack of water, lack of food.

Nobody was thinking of us, to stop somewhere to give us something. No one. Except, they opened the wagon on a station, to take out the bucket. We were so happy, when we saw, you know, they-- we gave it to the SS, to take it.

And that's all it was. There was a little window, that small, with wires, barbed wires, between. And my mother was standing. She loved nature very much, and she came from that area, the Tatra Mountains. She came from Czechoslovakia. And she didn't see those places for a long time, because we were separated-- Romania and Czechoslovakia.

And she says, we are in the mountains of Tatra. How beautiful it is in the morning. And she says, maybe they taking us for to work. And she thought so, you know, maybe we're going-- it's war, and maybe they were-- she consoled our self.

So we were riding like this, three nights and two and a half days. The trains arrive always at 1 o'clock exactly in Auschwitz.

Meanwhile, always somebody, until we were still in Hungary-- until Kassa-- a Hungarian soldier came up and told us to give our valuables. The last time, he's telling us, if we don't give gold we have or diamond or ring or watch-- anything-- if we are not going to give it to them, they will find it, and the person will be punished-- 100 for 1. That was the word. 100 for 1.

So we passed, and the German came always. They wanted our gold. They wanted our money.

We got used to that tsuris. We didn't even listen to them anymore. No.

So, after the third night, we had-- approaching Kraków-- this, I don't remember-- the second or the third night-- we had a big air-- the Americans came-- how is call it, attack, attack. And the SS and all of them, the guards, ran away from the railroad station, and they left us locked in the cattle wagons, all of us. And we couldn't go nowhere.

So the attack was over. And I remember, my father-- I had his head in my lap-- he was crying.

And we arrived in Auschwitz. And I don't know-- Monday, I guess, it was Monday or Tuesday-- my mother looked through the window and says, there is a crazy-- some crazy people here, he said. They wear rags! And they don't have hair.

They look at those women. I could see. I went there, and I could see. And they were-- you know, now I know how I looked, from the far-- no hair and gray dresses they wore. First when we arrived, we all got gray dresses.

So there was no time for thinking-- no time. Big noise. Dog barking, and the killers barking, the SS and the Gestapo, and everybody--

And the thing opened. You know, the wagon opened. And-- heraus, heraus, heraus. Everybody had to go out. Schneller. Schneller. You know what this means-- fast.

And they was just throwing with people already. We were not people already.

I remember, one Polish boy caught me. Now I understand, because I read about them. They belonged to the Kanada, those groups who came to the wagons and collected our-- what we had to leave.

They told us to leave everything. Meanwhile, he was talking loud. Three or four, they came in, and they say to us, there is no 13-year-old between you. Everybody's 16 year old. If some old, the oldest is 45 year old. Nobody is 50.

So they know they can't help the-- you know, they talked Jewish like this. They were hollering, two of them, and two of them were talking. I remember, they told us there is no 13-year-old. If somebody asking, you know, no.

But he didn't-- they risked their lives. They were not allowed to talk to us.

So we were thrown out. One Polish boy caught me and throw me far away from my mother and my sister. That's what they do, the young people. You know?

Still, we went there to die, all of us. We are not supposed to survive, no one of us who went in Auschwitz. But still, to die, everybody has time-- they thought. And they were right.

And then we came out. And Mengele is standing there-- handsome, tall officer. The music is playing. And with a white glove in one hand, in the other hand he had those stick-- I don't know how they call it--

A baton or wand.

--yes-- and showing left and right. And he told us they were the older people on the left. They could take-- oh, oh-- and the mothers, with babies, children, on the left. Older people-- young people on right.

And it went very fast, because they came and they beat people. And everybody was afraid from beating. So we didn't have nothing. Well, we couldn't hit back. We didn't have with what.

And so the selection went on. I remember, they start marching. I remember my father looking back to us. And we didn't even say goodbye to each other. I thought we-- everybody thought we're going in the same place. And then they left, a big group of people on the left, and we on the right-- to live for a while.

And they took us in a place. We didn't know-- we-- they didn't tell us anything, where we're-- now are we going here or there? No! [GERMAN]. You know? [GERMAN] fun! Stay. [SPEAKING GERMAN]! And hollering-- "Links, Links, Links, and Links!" You know what is? That's--

How you march.

--march, left and right. And Links, and Links. They made such a noise. And we had to-- we went-- no stop, no rest, for three nights and-- three nights and two and a half days-- excitement and everything-- no rest.

So we arrived in a place. And we had to stand still. And we didn't even have to think. We didn't have time to think where are our parents. Where did the old and the children go-- or a mother who was still young, and she gave it to-- because those Polish Jews told the young mothers they should give their children to the grandmother. And some grandmothers were walking with three and four grandchildren, one in their arm and two beside.

The babies were taken care right away. The babies were thrown on trucks. I saw them every day I was working in that washroom-- call it washroom-- call it WC. And I saw them, right away, putting them on the trucks and the-- looking like nurses, German women, with that fancy thing and dressed up in white. They were carried the buggies, to fool people they're taking the kids somewhere.

The buggies were empty. And a half an hour later, the kids were dead. So I saw that every day.

Now, you arrived at-- was it a barrack, where they took you?

We arrived, and I go back. We went in a place where they shave our heads first. Listen to this. I look in, and I see a beautiful girl, my best friend, sitting there. And handler Sori, who I was talking about-- he was our commandant in the house where we lived. And he-- she has a shaver, a shaver, and shaving her. She--

I looked over there. She is bald. She-- now one of my friends already have hairs already. So-- [SPEAKING GERMAN]. The next. I go in, sit down, and I am shaved.

Then they told us to take off our shoes-- throw down our dresses. I have a nice spring coat with me. It was-- you know, we always took the-- in May, it's still chilly, so we had our coats and dress.

The coat has to be thrown separate and our dresses thrown separate. And hold on to your shoes, in your hands. After we were shaven, they commend us in in another room. There is a big bottle of water-- water. And two SS men or three-- who knows how many-- stands there.

We walk in, naked. We were shaved all over from hair from our bodies and smeared then with a greenish like of a liquid.

And we go in the other room, and a man, an SS, just-- like-- it was like-- a paintbrush-- put it in that liquid, in a pail, and he smeared us, after he shaved us. It was so strong.

We went into-- to that room, and they told us we should put our shoes in that bottle of water and rinse it out, if there is anything in it. So, after this, everything was done. We went to take a shower-- a shower. We came out alive, fortunately-- our shower.

And , then they throw us a dress-- only one-piece dress, a gray dress. I had a fancy shoes, a new shoes for Pesach. [LAUGHS] You know, you buy-- bought things, especially for Pesach-- new dress, new shoes. That was all of everybody, even the poorest people. So that was my beautiful, new shoes I bought from Satmar.

And I had that all wet from the water. And they told us, Schneller. If you don't Schnell, then you got beaten up. Everything had to be made very fast.

So we went out. It was a platform, like a yard. I have here a picture of that-- a clipping. And they throw you a dress-- one piece, a dress-- no panties, no bras, nothing, no slip-- only one dress.

Now, we had our life and bodies and souls and covered with one piece a dress-- if you call a "dress"-- a gray dress. It was like a shift. It was cut out. It's nothing-- just covered us.

And we stand up to funf and marched up-- [GERMAN]. We went to a barrack. It was a Gypsy Lager.

And we went to the barrack, and we started thinking. After then, finally, we are somewhere. But where are our parents?

And a young lady-- I know her-- she was 21. She gave birth to a baby girl, two weeks ago, in the ghetto. She says they take away, somebody, her has a baby. She doesn't have an address where to call. And she become hysterical-- and all of us. And the Blockalteste was-- a Blockalteste was who is chosen to be our supervisors in the block.

Was it someone from the group or someone else?

No, a Polish or a Czech girls. Because Czech Jewish girls were taken away, some of them, three years before. Beautiful girls were given to the soldiers, on tickets or coupons. That was true. That was true.

And from those girls who were taken away before, they were there already for a long time, and they were trained. They knew German. And they had to be responsible for us-- or Polish Jewish girls.

They were dressed up like that every day in different dresses. They had their hairs. We envied them so much. We were bored, naked, hungry, and they looked nice. And they had more to eat than we had.

So those girls took us over. Her name was Marika. She was a doctor's wife. And she has a substitute "Schreiberin," they called-- a secretary-- Schreiberin. I could name her like this-- [NON-ENGLISH]-- and those two.

Then they chose also. When we went out for Zahlappell, next morning, and they chose from us who spoke German. And then they should-- the German officers or German SS women never spoke directly to you or us. Always, somebody has to be between us. That's why we had those girls chosen from us.

And they had to execute everything the Germans told us-- the rules and regulations. They told us we have to get up in morning at 4 o'clock and go out in the WC-- washroom. You know, I can describe the running. Because we only had, I think, two WCs in the back and two in the-- one Lager had 2,000 inmates.

And everybody was in a hurry, very much in a hurry, because we were-- you didn't have time to wait. But we had to go in the bathroom-- let me call that-- I don't know how shall I call latrine-- a bathroom. We had to go, because we had to stay from 6 o'clock until 10 o'clock for Zahlappell--

What is that?

--in Auschwitz-- Zahlappell, for numbering you, numbering people. You didn't have names, in Auschwitz-- numbers, dead or alive. That was no trouble if somebody died. It has to stay Zahlappell there.

I saw a picture-- three sisters. The fourth was dead. Somehow she died. And she was covered there, in front of them, counting the five.

You understand me? Three, four, and she was the fifth. But she had to stay there, or lay there, dead, covered with a blanket.

And all day we were busy, with this, with the tsuris. We were busy, all day, with the tsuris-- running-- running to the washroom. So they gave us the breakfast.

Let me tell you about the breakfast. Six people, or I don't know how many, was chosen by the Blockalteste. Let me stay Blockalteste, the people who were chosen from us-- to send people to pick up the coffee from the kitchen.

In the morning, we didn't have bread or anything with our coffee-- if you call it "coffee." It was a dark water-- water. They said-- you know, the evergreen has that long fruit.

Yes-- pine cone.

Pine cone, you call it? That's what we find. From that, they made the coffee. It was good-- warm. It has a sweetish taste. And you make sure you have plenty from it, you know, to satisfy yourself.

To me, or to others, that was the idea. We should have something, anything, in our stomachs. That's why we survived somehow.

And the food-- so, we got one dish for five.

Now, this was at--

Auschwitz!

--say, at lunch or--

The breakfast.

Oh, the breakfast.

That, you got a dish for, about a liter. And that, they gave that for the first. And everybody was drinking very

consciously, not to swallow more. God forbid that water shouldn't have or the last. If there was leftover, then we start again from the first. And that person starts swallowing-- maybe she counted. I guess I did. I didn't want to have more or some-- everybody should have.

After we drank that mush, we throw the dishes away. There was a pile. They told us where to throw the dishes. Those dishes were from ours what else, you know chipped ones what they didn't needed, because the good dish, they saved that for themselves.

And so we throw away the dishes. And the flies was having a good time on them. Those didn't have to be washed, because that was only liquid.

So, 12 o'clock, we didn't get anything. At 4 o'clock, 4 o'clock, Zahlappell again, going in the washroom, and coming back for 6 o'clock. Then we got a piece of bread-- not a piece of bread.

It was a square, about 2 kilograms, I guess, if I am sure, that big and square. And it was cut first in five-- then, later, six-- then eight-- and so on.

We had a piece of margarine, about that size-- how much you spread once on a slice of bread. That was supper--

For five people.

--for five people. And they put it on, on the bread, in the first row. Sometimes we had some marmalade-- 1 teaspoon full. Sometimes we had-- we had-- I think that was 12 o'clock. 12 o'clock. I guess so. Let me think.

In the morning, with our coffee, piece of salami made from horse meat. Oh, it was so good. [LAUGHS] it had every taste. We never had salt.

And we never had our periods, after we start eating that food. Had, specially the soup had a very funny taste. And after one week you were there, girls, we find out there is nothing coming. And we lost our menses.

We had, for supper, a mush with barley. And it was mixed with a kind of green. I know in Hungarian. I don't even see here in United States! If it touched your hands, it made on your skin bubbles. And in Europe they gave it to the pork, the khazir--

To the pig. Mhm?

--pig-- pig food. That, we had in it [INAUDIBLE].

After we were crying, the Blockalteste told us, the-- I says, what is it? How long we are going to be?

I don't want you to ask questions. I am here for four years-- five years-- and I could be-- I can lose my hair like yours again.

Why did you come here, they told us. You animals, why did you come here? Then we start crying.

Says, why did you come here? Then, she told us, when I came in Auschwitz, she said, we build the barracks. When we came here, we didn't have this barracks.

We opened the tallis-- you know the tallis, the prayer shawls? And people were holding those prayer shawls, and we were working under it. And that's how--

At least you have a cover-- some kind. We didn't have-- I don't want you to ask questions. You just eat whatever they give you-- anything! You make sure. It doesn't taste good. You should have it inside-- anything.



We had sand in it. [LAUGHS] We had-- you could feel-- it wasn't even washed! And you know, that too, it was thick sometimes. We were happy.

And we had a kind of-- "rÃ©pa," in Hungarian. It's beets, but it was long-- for the cows and horses. That was cut in pieces and put in. Oh, you were lucky if you get a piece like this. It has--

We talked about, it has the vitamin, and you shouldn't look the taste. You should eat. We tried to convince each other, everybody should eat the food-- anything food, anything they give you.

So [SIGHS] it was stories, and I don't want to go-- it's interesting, but it would take me too long to tell the everyday life of Auschwitz-- the selection of people, daily, chasing you out--

I think we should try to learn as much about that as we can.

Very interesting. And it's clear to me, and I-- so the selections-- and we try to steal. The second day, we went out for Zahlappell, and we didn't have our hair. We didn't have a sweater. We didn't have a panty or a slip-- anything on us, anything at all. It was cold.

And our Blockälteste, Marika-- if someday she will find out I was talking about her-- I appreciated her. She didn't have one person in the blocks. Because if you sneak back to the blocks--

You know, Mengele was always coming, or the SS, to look-- go up on the bunk beds, three or five. And if he finds somebody didn't feel good, they took her right away to the gas chamber. So that was her policy. Her group, 1,200 girls, no matter what.

I was breaking stones-- stone. And then I went to clean. The first day I went out to break stone-- because they repaired the Lagerstrasse-- I met a Polish boy. He came straight to me. And he says--

He was [NON-ENGLISH] an officer in the army, and he went every day to the arriving of the newcomers. He had food. And he brought me khazir-- you know, that-- now they're selling in the stores, that pork for sandwiches on white bread.

And he gave it to me. And I didn't want to take it. Until then, I never ate treif. And I had people, girls, they invade me and says, give it to me. I'll eat it!

Then a third day, again, he show up every day. And he told me what to do and what not to do. You don't go nowhere voluntarily, unless you have to. Don't drink the water, because-- no good. And he--

He was very good. He passed by the row, when we were-- you know, the blocks had a space between them where we stayed for the Zahlappell, to count us. "Zahl" is "count." "Appell," the book they should book to register us-- "Zahlappell."

So he went and start-- or, I start thinking-- my older sister start being a little weak. I says, I accept. That's all he gave it to me. And he left.

Mhm.

OK? Shall I stop?

No, I just wanted to ask you-- this young man was a Polish Catholic.

Yes.

He was a soldier.

Yes. He was an officer in the Polish army. And he deserted. Somehow was he did something. I never talked to him-- never. That's all he did.

Once, he wrote me a letter. I was volunteering, I wanted to go someplace, and they asked 200 girls to take some blankets in Birkenau, another factory. And when I came back, he was standing in the Lager, at the gate.

And he wrote me a letter. He thought I went in the crematorium. They took us there. And he says, never again, unless they call you-- unless you have to, never volunteer anywhere.

And we ate our food with no spoon! That thick-- thick-- we didn't have-- he gave me a spoon. Nobody-- it was a spoon, you could fold it like this and open it. And I never took that spoon over. I put it on my bed, you know, under the wood. How is call it? those barracks had wood, across, like the Spanish buildings.

A beam. A beam.

Beam. You're right.

Well, we're going to continue in a moment. And we'll return to discuss with Mrs. Schmelzer more of her experiences for this Holocaust archive project.

OK?