

I'm Donna Karen Yanowitz. And today I'm talking with Helen Kormis, a survivor of the Holocaust. And first I want to thank you, Helen, for participating--

You're welcome.

--in this Holocaust archive project, which is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section. First what I'd like you to do, Helen, is just tell me a little bit about yourself today. Tell me how old you are and where you live, and tell me a little bit about your family.

OK.

How old are you, Helen?

I'm 85 years old.

And where do you live?

I live in Cleveland Heights.

And do you have any children?

I have two children, a daughter and a boy.

Do you have grandchildren?

I have-- yes, three grandchildren-- four grandchildren. Yes.

Three great grandchildren.

This is Helen's daughter, Lilly Feig, who is also a Holocaust survivor. And she's going to be speaking with us also. Tell us a little bit about your life today, Lilly. How old are you, and where do you live? And tell us about your family.

I am 56 years old. We live in University Heights. I have three children, three grandchildren. And we're very happy here in Cleveland.

Do you work or--

No. I haven't-- I'm not working.

OK. Let's go back now to before World War Two. Let's go back to about 1939. And let's talk about what your life was like in the town, in the country you lived in. Helen, what country are you from?

From Czechoslovakia.

All right. And what town did you live in?

It's Solotvina.

Aknaszlatina.

That's in Czechoslovakia.

Yeah.

How old were you in 1939, before the war?

I was born in 1928, which made me 11 years old in '39.

What was your town like?

Well, I have been told that distance makes everything seem nicer. But it was a nice place. It really was. I was a very nice place, especially when you hear of places in the area that didn't even have a sidewalk or had no cultural life. We really had everything there. We had a hospital. We had doctors and dentists and high school.

We even had a little airport there, which my husband thinks it's so funny because whoever heard of an airport in that area. But we did have a military airport where I come from.

How big a city was it? How many people? Do you know?

I don't know the number of the population there. But I know that by the way my father used to count it, it was 600 Jewish heads of the families. There were Jewish people in the area there. They used to call them 600 tallisim Every man that put on a tallis was counted as a head of a family. And that's the amount of Jews that lived in that area, which made for a very nice Jewish population because everyone had a wife and quite a few children.

Was there any industry in your town? Do you know?

Yes, there were salt mines. But they didn't hire Jews. I think that only one or two Jews were working in there.

Helen, can you describe your family to me in Solotvina?

In Solotvina.

Solotvina.

Solotvina. Tell me about a day in your life in Slovenia. When the children went to school, what happened.

The children left in the school, one boy and two girls. One passed away in a concentration camp, the little one. And I was a housewife. We had business. My husband was in business.

What business was he in?

We had a shoe store. And we had a mill. [NON-ENGLISH]

A mill, flour.

A mill?

Yes. Yes.

A flour mill?

Yes. Yes. In the country, yes. And we live very nice. We had a beautiful home.

Were you a religious family?

Yes. We was Orthodox, religious.

Was it a large family? Did you have--

Yes.

Did your parents live with you, and your sister?

No. No. My parents live in Czechoslovakia too, far, far from me. And I had brothers. I had a sister in New York, and she passed away. She had cancer. And I had two brothers, passed away, and three brothers that by Hitler. [CROSS TALK]

Would you say your family was well-to-do, a well-to-do family?

Yes. Yes.

You were comfortable?

Yes.

And how do you remember those early days?

Well, it's-- I guess I remember things with a child's mind mostly.

That's right.

I went to school. We used to fight, my brother and my little sister. And we wish-- I remember that we had a nice life at home. I believe that we would have never left there if it wouldn't have happened. But whatever did happen, so--

Did you have a lot of-- did you have any non-Jewish friends that you played with?

Yes. I did have non-Jewish friends, which were a great disappointment at the time when we had to leave. Everyone, they all turned out to be the biggest disappointment of my life.

In what way?

Well, before we had to-- they put us into the ghetto, we were supposed to whitewash the windows so we couldn't look through them. You see? And we were not supposed to open the windows either. And I remember that one of the kids that we grew up with and played with and thought as a friend, my mother stuck her head out. And he yelled in that, "you dirty Jew. You can't look out." Those were really-- those were disappointments. Those were disappointments.

The Germans were impersonal. We didn't think of them as people that we knew. They were like a mean machine or a mower that mowed us down. But they didn't have-- they weren't our friends. The friends that turned against us, that was hurting a lot.

What was the main language that you spoke in your home?

Well, in the area, people did spoke-- they did speak Yiddish mostly. But my mother comes from an area where the language was Hungarian. So in our home, we always spoke Hungarian.

That's you spoke, Helen.

Yes. We--

Usually, we still do.

What kind of books did you have in your house? Did you have books?

We had a lot of books. We always had books.

Me too.

Helen, do you remember what kind of books?

I can't so good I remember now.

But we did. I had a lot. I read-- all the books that were-- that were being read here, we had there. Like Rebecca, I remember reading. I remember reading *Gone With the Wind*. I remember-- I remember seeing *Oz*, and *The Bluebird* in the movies. I mean, we--

Was there a theater in your town?

Yes. We did have one.

I remember, I read [PERSONAL NAME].

She's talking from Hungarian authors.

Petofi.

Yeah. She's talking about Hungarian authors.

Yes, I remember.

How do you remember yourself in those days? Were you a healthy little girl and happy?

I was a happy, healthy little girl. And I was a passionate reader, I remember. I used to-- I used to hide everywhere possible because my mother wouldn't let me read. She said it was bad for the eyes to read so much. And I mean, in the outhouse I used to hide. Everywhere-- I used to hide everywhere with the books.

Did you have any special interests, Helen? Do you remember, were there any political groups in your town or Zionist groups maybe?

My mother would not really remember.

No. Not, no.

But I remember them.

Do you remember of them?

Yes. I do remember. I belonged to the-- my father sent us to the Aguda. I was an Agudist. That was the Ultra-Orthodox. Then there was the Mizrachi and the Betar. And they had the Hashomer Hatzair. They had-- they were called halutzim. I remember. All those things, I do remember that they were there. And we used to discuss them. And they were [NON-ENGLISH] because they were not religious-- not all of them. Like, the Mizrachi still was religious. But like the Betar and the others, they were not.

And they all believed strongly in Israel. And I also remember how many people wanted to come to Israel. And the Ultra-Orthodox rabbis were against it. A lot of people would have been saved if they wouldn't have been against it so much, which is nothing new. Everyone knows that.

Were you aware of any antisemitism in the town before the war?

Yes.

In what way?

I remember a neighbor. His name was Emlaver. And I hope he burns in hell. I remember seeing a young man cross over a bridge, and there was some construction going on there. I never spoke about this to anyone. And he took like a 2 by 4, and that bochur that was-- a yeshiva bochur that was crossing that bridge, he took that slab, that 2 by 4. And he was hitting him that I think that that boy must have spit blood. That's how he was hitting him.

And then we had a neighbor that was supposed to be a friend. She came over to my mother, and she said that my mother should give her diamond earrings because she says to my mother, "where you are going, you're not going to need it," and little things like that.

And she was a good friend.

She was supposed to be--

She came ever single day in my house. And she sit by the window in all years. And she wanted to go to a party, she tell me, give me the earrings because you don't want more. Why? Because, you know. So I don't want to ask because I don't want to cry. And I don't give her.

And then we moved away Friday in the morning, 9 o'clock. I prepare everything on the stove, soup, and in the dough-- in the dishes, to make challah. And we left. And she stayed by the door outside, the lady.

They were like vultures, really like vultures.

So it was not so easy, not so easy. And you know, I was very sick when I came home from-- I don't came home from concentration camp. Just I was in Theresienstadt. And I was in typhus, so I can't remember so everything, you know, like it was.

She had typhoid, my mother. That's why she says she cannot remember everything.

What do you remember about the beginning of World War Two? When were you first aware that there was a war?

Well, we were aware immediately. We knew. We were getting newspapers. And my father was a very with-it man. He was really well-read, and-- and there were radios. So we knew.

He was a religious man. Yes, but he was also a very intelligent man. We knew what was going on.

We had every month, from America, newspapers. My husband, yes, he was a very religious man. You know?

What were the ways that you became aware? What were the changes that took place in your city when you knew there was a war, in the people and what happened?

Well, the Czechoslovakian-- the Czechs had to-- you see, when Hitler came into power, that was given back to the Hungarians, that part of the country where we lived. That was Hungary before. And then in 1918, the Czechs got it. When I was born there, it was Czechoslovakia. And then the Hungarians got it back through the Germans.

That was in 1939?

In 1939. And nothing was the same anymore. Nothing was the same.

How did your life change once the war started? What changes did you have to make in your family life? What happened?

Well, they sort of-- Jews couldn't travel. And--

How did you feel about that?

Well, we felt very bad. I mean, we were-- my grandmother lived far away, and my mother had to be traveling. And she-- she did not look too Jewish, and she really took chances with her life.

And I'd get by, I'm a Gentile. I'm not a Jew.

And that's how she went to see my grandmother.

That's why I left to my mother when I want to see her.

You were able to do that when you--

Yes.

Did you go by yourself?

Yes, myself. And the children was with my husband. And I had a maid in house at this time.

That was already-- that was before. And somebody came over to watch us. But my mother had-- has had the-- the only way she could travel, she remembers, when she came back, she was telling us what those people were saying on the train. It was horrible.

Talking such a thing from the Jews. Yeah, everybody was so happy. Everybody was very happy. Now we take everything away from my neighbors. We be rich.

You heard this on the train?

Yes. And I'm listening. And I tell-- and I tell-- yes, you'll be lucky.

My mother had to play the part that she wasn't Jewish. Because I can't-- you know, I can't tell I'm a Jew.

Do you remember anything else that they were saying?

Yes.

Let's talk now about the Nazi era, when the Nazis came in. What happened to your family when they entered your town?

Well, it wasn't the Nazis. The Nazis didn't come in.

No, we don't have Nazis in house.

The Wehrmacht came. The Wehrmacht came in. And they were the nicest people you can ever meet. They were regular army, the regular German army. That was around Pesach time. It was before Passover. And they were stationed because we had-- they took away our businesses and whatever, so we had empty, empty business places there. So they were stationed there. They confiscated it for the military.

Who did that?

The town. And they put up the German military in those places. So they practically lived with us. And I remember, we used to heat-- we used to use wood for the stove. We had the fireplaces, like stoves and ovens, whatever, but you had to feed it with wood. And he was so nice. My father was an older man. And he was splitting the wood for him so we could use it.

They were-- or I remember that eggs were scarce, and they gave us eggs. I mean, they were very-- they were nice people. They were not-- they were not Nazis.

This was the German army?

This was-- it was called the Wehrmacht. They were very nice. I don't-- I think if they did know anything, they just-- they just felt sorry for us. I don't think they had anything to do with that. They were the regular army that was going through the country. I don't know where they were marching. And they were stationed where we lived.

In other words, you're saying they came in, but they left.

Yes. After a while, they were marching further. It was the Hungarians that were bad to us. They rounded us up. They locked us up. They beat us. They were bad, the Hungarians.

Were you able to stay in your own house?

Well, the ghetto that we were in, our house fell into it. So there was a street that was closed down on both sides, and that's-- our house fell into that area. So we happened to be able to stay in our own home. But we had other people from surrounding villages and from surrounding towns brought into our home. You see, they concentrated everyone. And they left us as little room as possible because from the whole city, from Solotvina, where we did live, they also brought all the rest of the people into that area and also a lot of people from other places.

Yes, and my house was full. We had a big store, two stores. And from the countries coming lots of people in the ghetto. In my house was a ghetto. And we don't have just a little room for my family because the people coming. And they gave what we had from house.

My daughter-- I bake every single day bread, and she take it in temple, six bread every day. And one time I want to give for the people, bread. I don't see. And I tell where is the bread. And my daughter tell-- and she crying. I take it in temple because just came lots of people here. And I take it.

And my husband, maybe 52 shirts he had. And every day she take, under the coat, a shirt for the people because the people was so poor and beat the boys, you know, the bad boys.

She means the Hungarians, the bad boys.

You had a lot of people coming from outside the town who were living in the temple?

Well, they filled up the temple also with people. Every space they had, they filled up with people because that's where they were concentrating us before they took us to Auschwitz. And then after they had everyone together, then one morning they-- I don't remember if it's Friday or Saturday morning-- they took us and put us on the trains. And they took us to Auschwitz. But you see, this way they didn't have to round us up from all over that day. We were already rounded up. Everyone was in--

You stayed in your own house until you were-- were there any non-Jews at this time who tried to help you at all? Well, there was one young man. But I was a cute little girl at the time. And he must have liked me because he offered to keep me, to hide me. I remember. I remember him. He also got us potatoes and whatever. He was nice.

But I think he did it because of me, not because he liked Jews. He was just cute, and he liked me. And he was offering

my parents that he would hide me, which I wouldn't hear of. I went with my mother and father. I went with them.

Did you set up any kind of Jewish council or Judenrat in this ghetto?

You're asking the wrong person. I don't know about those things. I was a litt--

Do you remember anything like that, Helen?

I don't think my mother would either.

Were you able to go outside of the ghetto?

I went with that particular boy. He took me.

No, I can't go. My husband he can't go. My--

[NON-ENGLISH] His name was Pop Jankel. And he took me once to another city for food. And he brought me back.

Yes, to Sighet.

Yes, he brought me.

--with a taxi.

He really put his life on the line for me.

Yes.

There are always some good people somewhere along the way.

She take down the star, you know, and he left with her.

I had-- my mother means the yellow star that I had to wear.

Everyone wore a star?

Yes. And when did you-- how long did you stay in this ghetto in Solotvina?

In the ghetto?

A few weeks.

Maybe six weeks.

And what happened after that?

Auschwitz.

No. It was terrible. We can't go out. We don't have what to eat. We can't go out to shopping because a gendarme would come on us. The-- this is not a--

The Hungarian police-- it's not even police. It was like-- they wore those hats with the feathers on it.

Feathers. Maybe you see--



It's called the gendarmes. I don't know what you would call them in English.

He killed right now the people, the Hungarian. We can't go out.

You couldn't go outside of the ghetto?

No. No.

And there was no food.

I did go once. I did go once. I remember that that boy took me out.

Where did you get your food then?

No idea.

Like, I brought in a sack of potatoes. And I don't remember what else I brought in from Sighet.

We don't have lots to eat. We don't have-- in the six week, just a couple of weeks, we had from before. And later, we don't have nothing. And we had so many people what was in ghetto, in my rooms, in the stores, in the two stores.

Well, we tried to share. That's what she means. We tried to share. Whatever we had, we shared.

Do you know about how many people were in that ghetto?

A lot. I don't know. I don't remember. I don't remember.

Maybe 500.

[NON-ENGLISH] 500? No.

Yes.

[NON-ENGLISH]

No, not-- just by us. Just by us.

In our home were about 500 people.

In my house.

Yes.

In your house?

Yes.

Yes. I had a big house. We rented out. We rented out for other people. And then there were the stores that were large.

No, wasn't-- who knows how many thousand people was--

In the ghetto. They rounded up all over the area.

We had [NON-ENGLISH], we had.

Temple was filled up with people.

All-- when somebody had a big business, store, so it was awful because the Hungarian take away everything.

Now what happened at the end of the five or six weeks?

They marched us to the high school. And-- and we were permitted to take a backpack with us. And they took us to that high school. And the next morning, they put us in the cattle cars, and they took us to Auschwitz.

And you were with your mother and you father?

With my mother, my father, my brother, and my sister. I had a little sister that was, after six months, was killed in Auschwitz. She was-- she managed to come with us, with my mother and with myself. But then she just-- she just didn't make it.

Mengele. Mengele.

Can you tell me, Helen, what happened once you got-- what was it like on the cattle cars? How long were you on them? On the trains?

I think we were on them for three days. And it-- well, it was-- we were like cattle. That's about it.

And you went from Solotvina?

Yes, to Auschwitz.

To Auschwitz?

Yes.

And what happened when you arrived there?

Well, they made us stand in line, like five in a line. And there was Mengele. And he was selecting people.

And before, what the people doing with us was the rabbi and the boys and the mens, take the payos with the beard for the rabbi. And he was like a horse, you know. And he sat on, the boys, of the rabbis back.

She means the Hungarians. They were riding on him, on his back. My son-- my son had a couple pennies in pocket. He don't know. And the boys all coming and watch what he had. And he find money, and he beat my son. I think he died, poor boy because he find-- I don't know how many-- 18 cent or--

How long did you stay in the concentration camp?

Not too far, not too much. Maybe nine hour--

No. No.

--in the school.

Not in the school.

In the school, before we--

Auschwitz where we was, I guess, concentration camp. We were in a year. We stayed a year.

And you were with your mother the whole time?

Most of the time. They took me away once from my mother. And then-- I was lucky because I had pretty hair. I walked around crying there, and a lady said to me, what beautiful hair. That was six months almost, almost six months after we were in Auschwitz. And my head grew back a little bit, and it was all curls. And she kept on telling me how beautiful my hair was. And I had a head full of curls. And I started crying, telling her I wouldn't mind if they cut my hair again if I could go back to my mother.

And she says to me, where is your mother? And I told her that she's in C lager, in another-- in C camp. And I told her they took me away from my mother. My mother is there with my sister. And I said my mother will never make it because my sister is 13 years old. And if I'm not going to be there, they won't-- they just won't make it. She said to me that, if you listen to me, if you'll do exactly what I tell you, you'll be able to get back to your mother. But you have to do exactly what I tell you.

So she said to me, when they're going to test me for whatever testing they're going to do before they take those 600 kids away, I should pretend I can't read. I should say that I am unable to read first. Then they will exclude me from the transport. Then she said, I should start pretending that I have diarrhea, that I have typhoid. And they will put me into a hospital. I should keep on running through the night and waking up everyone until you-- start yelling. And they'll put me into the hospital.

And when I get to the hospital, they'll keep me there for a while. And I should stop pretending. And I should say that I'm better. And they'll put me into the next stage, in a place of recovery. And then they will ask me after a while which camp did I come from. Apparently, everyone with typhoid was brought there, and then they were sending them back to their original place. I should tell them I came from Camp C, and they will take me back there. And that's it.

And I did exactly what she told me. It took about two or three weeks until I executed all the proper motions. And my mother must have given up on me and everybody else. But one day I just showed up there.

What were you feeling and thinking when she was gone?

Oh, I was terrible. And one day I was happy. From C Lager, take it in the gas, the dead people. And where she was, the doctor or who was, she gave her a paper in a pencil. And she write me, don't worry, Mommy. I'll be back. And I was this time happy. And I cried every night and day. I don't eat, I don't sleep. I just cried. What be? And my little girl cry too. This time she was alive.

She was still alive, my little sister, at that time when I was taken away. Well, I don't know what went on while I wasn't there, but I really made every effort to get back there. And when she came home, everybody coming out from the block-

From the blocks where we--

And everybody-- nobody came home.

They couldn't believe it that I came back. Nobody believed it. I was really just lucky that I had curly hair. That's how I was noticed by that lady. And that's how she gave me all that advice. And I followed it. And I got back.

And we try one time-- we was very scared. So we go in an ambulance, you know?

It's like a little hospital. That's where they had this little hospital.

And we was three, my two daughters and I was. And we was-- you know, the bed was three-- of the--

Three layers.

Yes. And Mengele stay, and he asked for Lilly and for my-- Sylvia [NON-ENGLISH]. You like it here?

He talked to me.

And I was so sick, I think now when he talked me the children, he take her-- take away and gas the children.

He didn't-- he didn't pay attention to us.

I suffered so much.

Did he speak to you personally?

No, to me.

She met.

He spoke to me.

We suffered very, very much.

What did you do all day?

All day? The stone--

We were breaking up stones.

Stones.

We were standing in line, like for hours and hours and hours. It was called--

From 5 o'clock in the morning.

Zahlappell it was called.

This Zahlappell-- from early in the morning we stayed. And when we're talking, or my little girl freezing so early, you know. So and the SS lady see this. So beat us because we warm the body.

Well, we used to take her-- I used to stand on the end of the line. I was the strong one-- and my sister next to me, and my mother. So we used to take her between us so we kept her warm. And they didn't like it.

And one time was Tisha B'Av. So we fast. We don't eat. We had squash of dinner. And we don't-- of lunch, you know. And we don't eat because we fast. So we took it under the bed, and we covered it with something. I don't know what. And 8 o'clock we can eat, so we want to take it out. Was grow up, you know, was sour, this squash we get. And we don't eat nothing else.

Yes.

Were you aware of any religious services or secret prayers that were in the camp? You mentioned it was Tisha B'Av. Were you able to have any kind of service?

No. No.

You weren't aware of that?

Maybe the men did. I'm sure the men had something going. But the women didn't. You know, we were second class citizens as it was.

We was Polish people what cleaned, you know, outside. And he tell always what holiday coming.

The man, the man used to tell us.

The man. And he bring oil. And from the blanket we take out a little piece, and we make, Friday, you know, candlelight. We try. And we fast. We tried everything.

You don't know where-- your husband was not with you.

No, my husband gassed right now because before he was very sick. He was very skinny. And he take him right now in the gas chamber.

They killed my father immediately. And my brother was-- my brother was born in '29.

13 years old.

And in 45, he was about 14 years old, my brother.

Yeah.

At the time. And he also survived. He was just lucky because the kids his age hardly survived. And he was in Auschwitz for a while. And what he's telling me, he ran away from Auschwitz. They went out to work. And he took up with some partisans. He remained back in a forest. And he was found by them or he found them. And he was not-- he was not much in-- not too long in concentration camp.

Were any of the guards ever civil to the prisoners? Did they ever treat them decently?

Well, in Auschwitz, I only remember getting a good beating from them, from one of them. But when we were in the other camp, after they took us from Auschwitz, after my sister was killed and they put us on transport to a working camp, we were making-- we were sent to a place called [PLACE NAME]. and it was in the Sudeten by Teplitz-Schoenau, Teplitz-Schoenau. And we were making bombs and mines there.

Was your mother with you then too?

Yes. And we--

Because--

After that, we made sure that we were together. And there were guards that were nice. Some of the German ladies were very nice, and some of the guards were good. They were nice people.

Were you chosen to go from Auschwitz to this?

Yes. We were picked, like 600. And even while we were chosen, while we were going-- well, when we were-- whatever happened, we were taken to a bath always. And we had to take a bath. And then after the bath, they put us on those trains. So we were standing all night there before or after the bath. And our next door neighbor, [PERSONAL NAME] was standing next to us. From there they pulled her out. From there, right going to for transport, from there they-- standing right with us, and they pulled her out. She never came back. So you never knew what was happening.

In Auschwitz, what did you do all day? Did you work with the rocks too?

Well, we were-- in Auschwitz, I did what my mother did. I mean, we were together. We always went together.

How about in the six months that you were separated?

I wasn't separated for six months, just a few weeks.

No, just three weeks.

Just a few weeks-- I wasn't separated for six months, just a little while. It took me some-- about two or three weeks to get back to her. And then I got back to my mother. And then from there on, we were again together.

We was together.

Whatever we did, we were very busy always running. As long as my sister was alive-- she was killed sometimes at the end of November, and we got to Auschwitz in May. So we were very busy always, escaping. When we heard that there were selections, we used to get out from the block that we lived in, that we were sleeping. And we went to that hospital, where people had skin diseases. And they used to give them some kind of an oil to smear on it. I don't even know what it was called, but it was contagious.

But that was the only place they were not selecting. So when we discovered that, we used to just strip and start smearing that oil on us. And they left us alone.

The day they took my sister, they locked the doors from both sides and we couldn't get out. That's when they took my sister. Until then, we were always running. We were always going to that ambulance. That was called the ambulance, the ambulance place. That was what it was called, the little hospital or whatever it was. And we started right away with that oil.

But then when they took her, we didn't have a chance anymore. That's what kept-- and then we were standing in line for hours and hours. We were standing. And then we were taken also to-- with the stones. We were given a-- like a mallet-looking thing. And we had to hold the stone and hit it and crack it.

And we saw all kinds of horrible things happen while we were doing that. I remember that a child was taken away from a mother, also a young child, like, perhaps, my sister. And the German woman that was watching us, she had a dog. And that woman kept on wanting to go after her daughter. And she let the dog loose on that woman. Finally she shot her in the head, all while we were sitting there and watching. I mean those horrible, horrible things that we had to witness always.

And I understand that I have seen much less than others did, that much less bad things happened to us than to some other people. Because my friends were taken. They were marching on forced march, marches they were going. And they were more hungry than we were. And they were being shot all the way. Anyone that lagged behind was shot.

And those things never happened to us. We were fortunate to go from Auschwitz into a camp where we were working.

How long were you in Auschwitz?

From May till the end of November. After they took my sister, we had no reason to hide anymore. And my mother was 46 years old at the time. But my mother looked like 15 years younger. You can see, even now, that my mother does not look her age. So that was my mother's fortune, that she looked very young at the age of 46. And they never took her for what she-- for her age, and they let her pass.

I never was fat. You know, I was skinny.

She was always slim, youthful. And that's how she made it. She was not selected out. She was not weeded out.

Now what-- you say you went to a work camp. What was the name of that camp?

Welbout.

And where was that?

In Sudeten. It was in Sudeten. And it was by a town called Teplice-Schoenau, or Teplitz-Schoenau in German. It was a few kilometers from there. And we had--

How far was it from Auschwitz?

Oh, I think we traveled like for perhaps two days in cattle cars. I really-- don't quote me on that because I can't recall exactly. But I remember that they gave us a piece of bread and a piece of margarine. And we traveled. And we arrived there. And we were--

We was in Theresienstadt.

That was after that, we were in Theresienstadt. But we were treated more humanely than in Auschwitz because we were looked upon probably as workers already. And still we were treated as some kind of idiots there. Or I don't know. Every time that man that was in charge there, he used to call us Hottentots. He used to call us. You know what a Hottentot is? Hottentot? Anyhow, he used to say what should-- what should be-- what those Hottentots be. He used to call us. I mean, we were not people to him.

What were living conditions like in that camp?

Good.

It was a miserable life.

It was a miserable life. But the conditions were everyone had a bed for himself, for herself.

When we came to Auschwitz, we go out from the--

From the wagons.

Yes. So we see a big fire with trees. And we came, you know, five people in the line. And I see the fire. What go on? And I am looking. Take out the dresses, the suits, everything and running in the fire.

And she keeps on saying that, my mother. She keeps on. She must have seen something because she keeps on saying it all the time. And I don't recall it. But--

People running in the--

That's what she says. That's what she says. I don't remember it.

Yes. Yes. And we tell-- we must to tell Viduy. You don't remember it?

Yes. I remember that they were praying. I remember they were praying.

Because we go in fire, idiots, because we don't know where we going.

You see, when we arrived there, I only remember people on the road laying in puddles of blood. I remember that. Must have been people that tried to run away, and they must have shot them. That I remember distinctly, laying in the puddles of blood. But when we got to that room where they were-- they stripped us all. They took away whatever we had, that little backpack that we were permitted to take from home. They took everything. We had to undress naked, and they shaved everybody's head. And everybody had to take a shower.

But by the time we got in there, we didn't trust them. And everybody was-- it's called Viduy, they were saying. Everybody was saying Shema Yisrael. Everybody was praying, everyone. And then they took one of the girls, and they took her in the back and they shorn her hair. And they brought her out again. They said we should stop crying, and we should stop carrying on because that's all they're going to do to us. They're not going to kill us, they said.

So we went in there. And that's what happened. They cut our hair. They took away our clothes. They gave us something to wear, nothing underwear, no underwear, nothing on our feet. It was in May. It was a pouring.

I didn't recognize my mother. I didn't recognize my sister with the shorn heads. And then they-- then they took us into the camp. And it was a Gypsy camp where they took us. And we were so thirsty. We were dying from thirst. For hours, for days, nothing to drink. I remember they gave us a piece of bread, and we gave it to the Gypsies for a little drink. [NON-ENGLISH].

Yes.

Was this in Auschwitz?

Yes. That was in the Gypsy.

Yes, I remember.

Then they took us over to another camp, where life was more regulated. And the Gypsies didn't have their revenge on us. Because we were the one on the lowest ring gets the-- gets to be mistreated the most.

How long were you with the Gypsies?

I don't remember. Not too long-- for a few days. But I remember giving our bread for a drink. And then they put us-- and then we were in the other camp, where we stayed for six months.

Now, how different was life in the work camp that you went to?

It was very different. It was-- [NON-ENGLISH] It was not bad there. Really, in comparison--

Better was like in Auschwitz.

It was much better than Auschwitz, much better. It was really better. Everyone had a bed. Everybody got a clean shirt whenever you requested one.

Yes, we was clean. We had-- we can take a shower.

Any time we could take a shower. It was-- I mean, those things were very important to us. And we were very cold because we were there through the winter. And all we had is a-- like-- it would probably be like the blue jeans material-- that we had a pair of working pants and a little jacket or a shirt, a flannel shirt we had. It wasn't enough in January. You know, it gets very cold in Czechoslovakia. It's colder than here.

And when the snow comes down there, it stays throughout the winter. That's it. It doesn't melt. So we used to put newspapers around us to stave the cold off. It wasn't easy. And there were also other prisoners, like political prisoners, nearby, which were-- which helped-- they helped us a lot. They brought us a needle or a crochet needle or something.



That's so we could crochet a little something or make something for ourselves, which was hidden under the shirt because we couldn't wear it out.

And they brought us a little bit extra food once in a while or a half an apple. They didn't have much either. But those were luxuries. Like I say, we had it much better than other people. We were much, much more fortunate because we got-- in comparison to Auschwitz, the food, it was like-- it was like a gourmet restaurant in comparison to Auschwitz. We had food.

In Auschwitz, we had the grass from the yard, with stone, with dust, with everything, and water, and that's all.

I mean, Auschwitz was very bad.

What kind of food were you eating in the labor camp?

Well, one slice sliced bread a day, sometime a potato.

Carrots, which I didn't eat.

Carrots sometimes. I was very nervous always because I was scared for the children.

Not the children-- she meant me. She was always-- she always used to tell me that I'm going to die if I don't eat. I was probably spoiled. And I didn't like carrots, and I didn't eat them there either.

And this time too, when I'm nervous, I'm eating.

She gets nervous. When they took away my sister, I thought that my mother was going to go crazy because-- when I get upset, I can't eat. She was-- she kept on-- like there was a piece of little bread, like it was like a quarter of a brick and as hard as brick. And she kept on munching on it constantly. And I said, how in this world could she eat when those horrible things are happening. Whenever I said it to her, she didn't even know that she ate.

I must to do something, you know?

OK. She was a beautiful girl. She was so cute.

My little sister.

She was beautiful.

A little blue-eyed, blonde girl.

She became sick?

No, she was killed.

No, she was a healthy child.

They just selected her out, and they killed her. I've heard that they shot them while they tried to run away, and they were shot. Because you see, she-- he take the-- the SS man take here in the gas chamber. And she holler, and she running away. And he killed her.

I think we'll take a break now, and we'll come back shortly.

OK. [NON-ENGLISH] you

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