Now, Mr. Robicsek, after spending that couple of weeks as you indicated, you then were moved or transported to another section of the Auschwitz camp. Just by means of background, can you briefly tell us what your understanding was as to how large Auschwitz was and how it had been comprised, how many units it had, things of that nature?

We were moved-- first of all, we were numbered on our arms, you know.

Do you remember your number?

12,890, I really remember all the time. So as soon as we got the numbers, they loaded us on trucks. And they took us not far away, approximately 3 kilometers from Birkenau to the outskirts of Auschwitz, where they were around Auschwitz, they were in a large area. They were different sections of concentration camps. So they were separated with the command posts with everything, it was separated from each other.

When you say command post--

So this was a strictly-- command post, it was, you know--

Guard towers.

Guard towers, yes. And the commandant was for every day separate concentration camp who was taking care of that concentration camp. So we were strictly working force there. Because of my profession, I ended up in my profession in an ammunition plant not far away from there. We were taken by foot to the outside of the fences to the factory in the morning. And at night, we were taken back.

Now, this was a munitions factory?

This was an ammunition factory of the Krupp family.

All right. The famous armament family.

That's right.

And this particular job, or occupation, if you will, that you survived with all stemmed from that day that your father gave you that push.

Yes.

Did you see your father after that?

Never again.

So the push to break rank was the last time that you saw him.

It saved my life. And it didn't save his.

How about your brother? You had indicated was already at a labor camp some years before.

My brother was at labor camp.

You had no idea at this time what happened to him.

No. No.

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And by this time, you also had no idea as to your mother.

I knew about my mother because I found out soon as I got in this camp, the other camp in Auschwitz, they were people there who were there a long time ago.

They remembered her.

Oh, yes.

And your sister?

Oh, my sister, I didn't know where she is. But I knew in which side my mother went because I saw her. And I found out what that side, it means death.

First of all, what was the name of the camp you went to from Birkenau?

That was Auschwitz.

Well, did it have a particular name or identification or designation number?

No name. No name. It was Arbeit macht Frei. It was written on the entrance. So the work is making you free.

Did it have a barracks number?

I was on 4, barrack number 4, in the basement. Who was working at Union Maschinewerke, that was the name of the factory.

Union Machine Works, yes.

Union Machine Works. Before the war that was a bicycle factory. But it was all changed. We were working approximately 2,000 people there in 3 shifts.

Now, you did what in particular?

I was at the gauge making department. We made gauges for to check all the parts what they made.

All right. And this particular factory did it make all sorts of munitions or particular form of weapon?

Only they had an anti-air gun. [NON-ENGLISH], that was the name of the gun. It was an automatic gun. We made the head of the shell, which from speed, it exploded automatically.

So you made the detonation device--

Detonation head, only the head.

Were you told at that time how important your efforts were toward the German war effort?

Oh, as soon as they took us there, the commandant of the lager of the concentration camp--

Do you remember his name?

No. No. I don't remember. I remember his face, but not his name.

Describe it.

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He was a German guy with a blond hair. He had a face-- the area of his mouth showed the cruelness of him and how he was talking, you know. But if I would see today that face, not old, but how it was, I would recognize right away because I never can forget him.

He spoke many times to us. And he spoke only threatening us with every word. If you do this, this happens. I think so the death was the easiest punishment in his words, ever.

And you believed him?

Oh, yes, because we found out that it was the truth.

How long did you work in this munitions factory?

I was working from the end of June till January 15, because-- in '45, January 15. Because in 18, we were evacuated from there. The Russians came close. And next day, I think, so they took over.

So approximately 6 to 7 months.

Yes.

And you did the same job each day?

The same job, 12 hours a day.

To move our story ahead just a little bit to ask you this one question, at somewhere down the line, as you're working, making valuable components for the war effort, for the German war effort, did you think in your mind or make efforts to work just a little less hard? To do it not quite as good as you had been doing? To find some way to slow down that war effort, realizing that the end of the war might also be the end of your imprisonment?

First of all, I never worked hard. I only imitated to work hard. The second, approximately for three months, I was moved from this place to a place where they made all these little parts, which are the fingers of the automatic explosion. From the speed, those little fingers were moved out, changed the position, and make the explosion.

These were index automats, some automatic machines, which were working fully automatically. But you had to set them up. So I was put there to rework three of these, to rehaul because they were all used up, to can put them back in line and use them. And I think so, that was 40 years ago, even today is not finished because I did everything what could be done.

Still contributing to the German war effort.

That's for sure. That's for sure.

Marvelous. Tell me, on a day-to-day basis, what would be the routine that you would expect, the routine that took place in the course of a day as you worked in this particular factory, and how you would leave the barracks in the morning and return at night?

If nobody defected in that day--

And how many was that?

We were 20,000 people there.

At the factory?

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No, at the concentration camp, OK. If nobody defected, we could sleep all night long till in the morning the kapo came in and beat us out from the bed. That was the alarm to go out, first of all, Appell, to stay in line for counting, and then form the-- drink the coffee. They had a coffee every morning, black coffee.

Was it really coffee?

No, it was made from something. We never found out what. But it was tasting a warm water, you know. And it has a taste of some coffee.

And with that one, we had to march out. It was approximately 1.5 kilometers, the place where we went to work. And we started to work there.

And during the course of the day were you allowed breaks for food or relieve yourself?

Only when the food arrived. From the concentration camp came the food there, so when the food arrived approximately in the middle of the shift. Sometimes it was late. But as soon as arrived, then we had to stop and go in a line and get our one spoonful of food.

Now, the particular area that you worked in, you were reasonably near other prisoners.

Oh, yes.

Did you talk? Were you allowed to talk?

We weren't allowed. But we were talking. They were women there also. It's a very interesting situation, you know. You would think that there, which is the hell, there it stops the normal life, let's say, if you can name them normal.

It was a market. It was a black market in the concentration camp. We were 3 kilometers from Birkenau. Now, Birkenau, you were asking me before about the loot. There was a place in Birkenau named Kanada, Kanada, because of all the goodies what it went there. That was the name, Kanada.

And who was working there, they were the most luckiest people in our eyes, you know, because they were selecting the goods what went in there. The soap, from the soap to jewelry to anything to money, they were selecting-- that was their job-- to clothing, which was usable for the German people. And the clothing, which wasn't usable, that was given to us. OK.

And the food, what they gathered there, starting from chocolate to raisins to noodles to soap, because it was all mixed together, from that we got our meal. They named them [NON-ENGLISH], a German type of food, which was a very thick, having everything in it. So you couldn't find what kind of taste it is, you know. Canned food, what they found, they put it together.

Now these people had the food, first of all, which was life. And they had all the goods what they could steal from them. Now, there were women from Birkenau who had contact with the Kanada kommando. They got, let's say, scarves, which you could put 20 scarves, so very thin silk scarves, in your hat, under the inside of the hat, you know. And you could smuggle them in our concentration camp.

Jewelry, anything, you name it, you wouldn't believe it how people smuggled in things. Bed sheets, and we went through every night-- before we went, you had to stay in line at the door. Every night, the rows after rows, they went through. And they looked for things which we smuggled in.

So we smuggled them in. And at the attic of the block where we were living, soon as the night came, it was an open market up there. You could buy there anything what you can imagine in this world. It was amazing, you know.

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Now, in this 20,000 people where we were, there were kommandos who were taken in the city to dig sewer holes or to construct, to have the construction. And these people were taking these things to sell to the civilian people there. And they got cigarettes, which we didn't get. And they got alcohol, clean alcohol, which if you poured a little water in it, it was drinkable.

Now, the concentration camp had their own elite guard, who was the responsible of the block, of the respective building. They had schreibers. They had young kids who were like-- who were writing things, you know, what it has to be for all the bookkeeping and organization of that one block, you know. So it was an elite guard, and the kapos, the kapos who were the torturers, you know.

And these people had such a good life there. They were many homosexuals in this. And they kept a lot of young kids for themselves, or vice versa, differently. And they had they needed only cigarettes and alcohol. And they bought these for food.

So it was a complete organization like this, to get from Birkenau, to get the goods out in the city, and from the city to get in the Lager, the things that it was needed. But I don't have to tell you that if they catch somebody, many people were executed because of smuggling.

Publicly executed in the sense that it was done in--

Everything, the execution was always public, even if somebody defected, which was-- the record was a Hungarian Jew, a young kid, who was approximately 17, 18 years old. He defected. And he was away. They couldn't find him for seven days. This was the record because in one day, two days, because where could he go? Nowhere.

Because as soon as he cut himself out from this concentration camp, he went in another. So one was near the other one. So you couldn't defect. So this kid was.

And then we saw five executions, five hangings, at the same time. You had to go out and watch them. Also, we saw an execution when they exploded the crematorium.

I want to get into that momentarily. When you were in this camp, this Lager that you made reference to, and just again, so we understand the logistics of all of this, you said there were 20,000 people in your block.

Yeah.

And in your particular block, consisted of how many buildings?

There were approximately 10 or 12 buildings.

All right. Where is it that this black market that you described that had flourished?

In the top of our building.

In top of your particular--

Block number 4.

Was this also true and going on similarly as it was in your building in other?

No, because in this building where those people who were working at the factory. And we had the only contact with these people from Birkenau who brought the things from Kanada in.

At the time, did you consider it perhaps a sign of what your fate would be in this regard? Out of all the masses of humanity who were suffering, and that you saw day in and day out, here you were in the same building with access to

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the black market as you've described, what a stroke of luck. Did you see it that way at the time?

Yes. Yes. And we did different-- we were seven young kids, the same age, from the same city. We found each other there. So we formed a society, let's say, or a club, if you could name them that way. We were hungry and young. We were hungry all the time.

You were 18.

18. And we got only a small increment of the food what we needed daily, you know. So we started to steal, to steal from the SS. We were the volunteers to bring in, in our building, to bring in every morning the coffee, so named coffee. And at night, because we weren't in the daytime there, at night the dinner-- "dinner."

So what we did, we went to the kitchen, which was in a separate place. And it was all SS around there. And we instead-- in the courtyard of the kitchen, it were mountains of cabbage and potato. Later on when it wasn't anymore from the Kanada, when the transports didn't arrive so often, they were giving us cabbage and potato and boiled together. So that was the main meal then. And we could steal from there.

We emptied the coffee in the morning. And we piled up-- the potato it was a value which you can't imagine, and the cabbage, you know. And we arrived with the [NON-ENGLISH]. That's what was the name of it. We arrived-- it was a closed in because soup or coffee it was in it, we arrived with this one. And we gave it to the people because it was from our room, so nobody told anybody.

Or we found out where they are storing the bread. And I made in the factory, like you see here, like a hook, which you can push in, you can see with the firefighters. It has a sharpened point. And it has a hook.

So we broke the window from the kitchen-- from the warehouse of the bread. And we pulled this through. And we pulled out. And the SS was-- it was close to the entrance of the concentration camp, entrance. And we steal that.

And the buildings had four entrances, like a cross. And from there was opening the rooms. And we were running in there. If somebody ran after us, which happened many times, we were running in different ways. So they never caught us. They never caught us. We were named the Schwartzebande because we made things which I wouldn't have the courage today to even think about it really.

Would this happen on a frequent basis? Or are these isolated episodes?

No, this was fairly good organized. The people were waiting for us when we got back that we are getting more than the coffee.

Then it sounds to me as though in the course of this misery and your survival of that misery, you apparently made some friends, or got to have--

Oh, yes.

--very close acquaintances with individuals. Isn't that somewhat contrary to what you would expect in this kind of circumstances, not to get close to someone because you may not see them tomorrow?

I think so that-- we never thought about that.

Then you must have thought at the time that you would survive.

We had the same-- I think--

Somehow, some way--

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--that's why we survived because there were people who were closed in, and they had only one thing. Many people did that they went to the high electrical wire, you know. And they touched them. And they ended their life.

But the human is a-- I think so, it should live like a society. You can't pull out yourself only that you are the only individual in the bunch of the people. I don't think so. And that's the secret of survival. I think so that's the secret of the Jewish survival for 2,000 years.

The ability to remain--

To help each other and to keep together.

So you are your brother's keeper.

Yes, definitely.

Was that a unique or a new feeling that you had--

No, we this all the time--

--because of that. You had that all the time.

I think so. Only there, it was deeper. Yeah.

Do you remember some of these individuals quite well?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I remember all my friends whom I lost. I--

They're all lost?

--came back alone. My last friend, I lost him FlossenbÃ¼rg.

How did you lose your friends from barrack 4, block 4?

Three of them were selected because they were very weak. And they were taken to the gas, from Auschwitz.

In the course-- go ahead. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt.

And four of us, we were going on the deadly march, what it was starting on January 18, 1945.

The death march?

Yes. And I lost-- and the way we were helping each other, we were in the same row. I lost two of them there. And with one of-- this was the younger brother of my best friend, whom I lost in this way also. And my best friend, who was with me from kindergarten, I never will have in my life a friend like that because you can be friendly with people, but a real friend with whom you grew up-- we were even-- put the boys in the same place. We were learning the same profession. We were living in the same street all the time with our parents. And I lost him in FlossenbÃ¼rg. That's where I lost him.

You told me during the course of our break that one of your first loves was music and opera.

Yes.

You also indicated--

It still is.

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It still is. And you indicated there were individuals who you became friendly with who shared that same--

Oh, yes. Not only opera, you could see-- we were in the basement of Block number 4. There we had from famous actor, who is still famous, one of them in Hungary.

What's his name.

His name is Egri Stefan, Stefan Egri. He is a producer also. He became famous in Hungary, you know. So he was there. And we had the actors who recited Shakespeare. We had a cultural gathering, deadly tired every night and hungry. And this was our food, the culture. It was really--

And we heard stories there. They were artists and violin players. Famous people were there.

Do you remember any of their names?

I don't know the names. They were from different places. They were from Germany. Or they were from France. Or they were from different places.

Now, obviously in the course of time, since they've come from all different areas of Europe and the continent, you had chance to compare your stories, what happened to you, what happened to the next fella, right? Did it ever occur to you that perhaps the treatment that was given to Jewish individuals who came by way of example from Western Europe versus the Jewish individuals who came from Eastern Europe, the Polish or the Russian or the Lithuanian or the Ukrainian, versus the Belgium or the French or the Danish? Auschwitz was known for receiving all peoples from all different areas.

We know one thing. When we went to Birkenau, it was full with Gypsies, German Gypsies. In one night, they destroyed all of them to make place for us. A few kapos remained who were very cruel. I remember one kapo, which had a cut through his face, almost half of his head. And this was the cruelest man I ever met in my life. But no more Gypsies, from one day to another.

Then when they took us to Auschwitz, 3 kilometers from Birkenau, there were many Christian Ukrainians, Germans, who were all political or sex offenders or murderers for different-- they had different color triangle, who were the top echelon of-- the Jews were the lowest grade people. Now, these people had a fairly normal life there, the Christians, because they could get packages from home. They could get even visitors from home. They took them to a special place.

They even had their own whorehouse. The German SS and they had their own opera singers with the musicians, who played every time we went in and we went out, marches, you know. Now, these were the most famous musicians putted together. And they had, in the beginning, till the-- most of the people were Christians because in the beginning, we were not the whole population. Most of the people, approximately 40% were only Jews in that concentration camp, in that working concentration camp, and mostly Polish people were and Germans.

So they had their own opera house, not with the scenery. But with the orchestra, you know, and with the most famous singers in the world, from France, from Germany, from-- they were highly talented people. So we weren't allowed to go in there. All these privileges were only for the Christian people there.

Now, when there were more Jews in this concentration camp than Christians because they took out the Christians from there. And they made totally Jewish. They maintained we could stand at the back of the so named barrack where the opera or the orchestra was playing. And I went in a few times. The SS was standing in the front, or sitting in the front. And we had a little alley there at the back that we were allowed to go in there to listen.

And there, I heard the most dramatic aria from Tosca what I ever heard in my life. You can imagine in white clothing, the musicians totally bald. The hair was cut off, women also without hair. The most beautiful music in the world. The

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aria, the aria from-- the latter aria, you know, what he sings that he wants to live and he doesn't want to die, you know. And this singer was from France, from the France opera. I never forget that. And in front of you, they are the SS, your murderers, you know.

But it must have inspired you.

Oh, it was. It was.

And it has that kind of an effect that even 40 years later--

Yes.

--it's an incident that you'll always bring up and remember. I'm of the impression that you've had a number of signs throughout the course of your visit at Auschwitz. And maybe now, when you look back on it, you can see them as, in fact, what they were-- signs, an aria of an opera from an individual preaching the ability to survive and live.

Tell me, you mentioned this orchestra and how it would take you to work every day and get you back. And Auschwitz is famous for their orchestra. Do you have any contact with either the orchestra that was found in the area of the extermination camp, any individuals you might have spoken to who participated or know?

No, never. Because as soon as the Russians came close in 1945, January 18, from one moment to another, they gathered us. And you have to go. And we were marching away. You couldn't find who was who there anymore. Only your closest friends were to make it.

Calling your attention to the winter season, on Christmas, let's say, of 1944, by that particular time, had you known what was happening to the German war movement? Had you heard rumors as to how close or how far the Russians or the Allies might have been?

Yes. We knew everything because, how I said before, they took kommandos out in the city. And they could smuggle in parts of the newspaper what came in the city. And we knew, not day by day, but we were-- in that black market up there, that was all the news, everything what you needed, you know. And there were people who were watching the SS in which area is going everywhere around the block everywhere. And in one minute they could make them clean that you couldn't see anything that it was there. It was amazing how well was organized underground there.

Is that not a proof of your respect for how formidable the German soldier was or the SS soldier who was your captor? Did you have that kind of respect for him? I don't mean respect in the human sense, but his ability as a captor, his ability to keep you imprisoned and to make you work and perform.

I don't know if we had some respect. But I remember another feeling. all. Our thought was to survive and to work against there because that was our way out, to work against this whole big organization. So anything what we could do to, how much it was in our power, which you can't talk power there, only real power, even that, that I want to survive. Even that was working against the Nazis because that they made me to want to survive.

Did that come in a particular incident of some sort? Or was it just slowly formed, this opinion that you must survive?

I think so, soon as we started to leave, not in Birkenau, not in Birkenau-- in Birkenau, you were aching for water or to go to the toilet or to go back to your place and find a little [INAUDIBLE]. So there, you didn't have any more thought because you were so occupied with these low things, you know. But soon as we started to work, there for at least 12 hours a day, you were free in your mind. They wanted you to work, and they didn't bother you.

Only when-- every 10:30 in the morning, the Russian airplanes came to bombard around the concentration camp. They hit two times, I think so. But very interesting, they never hit the place where they were the people who were kept there. They hit once the command post. I don't know how they-- but perhaps they had a good information.

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And they hit around the building where we were working. We had to-- the SS, the great hero SS army was so coward, soon as it wasn't with the Jews, you know, that you wouldn't imagine, they were running down in the bunker where they had a special bunker. We had to lay down near the machine. And it was a glass, from blue glass, it was the whole factory. And the glass was shaking and breaking in where we were.

In that time, that was the only time when we could make some so-named government work for us. I was doing everything for a piece of bread. And so were the others, you know. And I was in a place-- it was very interesting. I could buy a piece of stainless steel.

First of all, when we arrived there in the factory, this commandant said that if they catch somebody stealing the stainless steel and doing something else than what it has to be done from it, they will shoot him right away in the place. So I had an engineer, who is today in New York, who is very active in the Holocaust things. And he was at the warehouse of the steel. He was cutting off according to the drawing what we presented to him. He cut it off the piece of material, any type of steel, and stainless steel, the same thing.

And for a quarter of a bread, I could buy a piece of stainless steel, from which I could make a ring. I made rings there-- a heart with two wings, all inspired by the freedom. I put it in there when I was working there. And this always when the alarm was and the bombs were falling around, we were working because we knew that the SS doesn't come up from the bunker.

So then what we did this thing. And I could sell that. I bought them for a quarter of a bread. And I could sell them for a bread. Even for the SS, I made a Christmas present for his kid. And he paid me a piece of wurst, a piece of salami and the bread. So really it was-- you lived, let's say, a normal life to Auschwitz, in the Auschwitz level.

Do you remember any of your captors names?

No.

Any of the SS men, first names?

I don't remember. Names, I don't remember. I was sick, very sick when they liberated me. And--

We'll get to that momentarily.

--it was involved with my brain.

A couple questions, during the period of time, let's say, using an example of an event when the Russian planes would drop bombs, you've mentioned a couple of times when they would do this, 10:30 in the morning apparently.

Oh, yes. We knew that it's 10:30, they came.

That was it.

Yeah.

Did you ever ask why the Americans or the Allies? You knew they were Russians.

We knew--

Did you ask what happened to the--

We knew that the Russian front is close. Later, I had involvement with the two bodied airplanes. I don't know what was the name of it. But we-- the American. These airplanes came with the bombing. Thousands and thousands of silver birds we saw. But that was later when they took us in Germany. And when we were marching.

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Did you ever ask, why it is an effort wasn't even made, by way of example, to bomb the railroad tracks--

Oh, yes.

--leading to Auschwitz?

Many times. Many times.

What did you think? You were abandoned?

Yes. Yes.

Now, while you're there, we understand that was the period of time that the famous revolt took place in Auschwitz. Did you have any involvement?

I didn't have. I had knowledge that they smuggled the explosives from this factory where I was working.

You knew that before the actual--

No, after that.

Afterwards.

After that. I wasn't involved in it.

What is your understanding--

Mostly Polish, the old timers were involved in this.

When you say old timers, I think it's important that we define it.

Who were there for six, seven, eight years ago.

The individuals who you previously described--

Yes.

--with the Sonderkommandos.

No, they were a few others also because here women who came from Birkenau, they were a few old timers there too. So these weren't-- the Sonderkommando, we never saw them again, only when we arrived.

When you got word that in fact an effort had been made, that one of the crematoriums had been exploded, as I understand, how did you find this information out? And how would you describe how you felt and what you were thinking at that time?

I was working near one machine. And this was around sometimes in afternoon. And we heard a faraway explosion. But we didn't-- we heard a lot of explosions when the Russians came and bombed, you know. So it wasn't any-- but within five minutes, near every individual in SS was standing with a revolver, like near me and everybody. So we knew that something happened.

Then right away it was stop the work. And they took us in the concentration camp. That was the first thing. We knew that something had to happen because the first time happened this, you know.

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And later, we found out through-- because everything was known. I don't know from where, how. But everything was known later. So we found out that some girls from the night shift smuggled out some explosives to Birkenau. And somehow it got to the Sonderkommando, which was kept apart from everybody. And they exploded the concentration camp.

And approximately, oh, for two or three weeks later, we saw the hangings. So they hanged some girls and they hang some men who was involved in this. And then it came slowly by slowly, we got all the picture of what happened.

Now, when it came to your attention that indeed there was an effort made by the prisoners themselves doing this type of action, how was your reaction? What did you think? What did you feel?

Oh, we celebrated. We celebrated. We were talking about what can we do?

In other words, what could you now do?

What could we to do something. It was a very comforting thought that the crematorium is exploded. We didn't one or two or all of them, you know. But we knew that it slows down the extermination of the people.

You knew for all the months that you were there at Auschwitz that it had been used--

Oh, yes.

--as an extermination camp.

Oh, yes.

And did any of the individuals who were involved with that? Had you come to meet any of these individuals?

No, never. Only it happened that father and son was in the same room with me, you know. And the father was picked for next day to be taken to the-- Mengele picked him on the line because the father was weaker, you know. And so like this we were involved.

Or we saw execution at the wall. It was a wall, a famous wall, in the--

Did it have a name or an identity?

The execution wall.

That's what it was called?

Yes. And there, they were executing people.

Well, now in January of '45, when the Russian front now comes very close to your front door, what happened?

We knew that the Russians are coming closer and closer. We even heard the gun shots, the cannon shots, not the gun shots. And the alarm was much more often. And one day, they didn't take us out to work. We were in the Appell. We were in the outside. And we were standing there for days. At night, late at night, we were taken in the room. So we knew that the Russians are very close.

So one day they came in and they said, everybody out. We didn't know that they will evacuate the camp. So everybody out. And they formed a column.

We had to go in front of the kitchen. And from there, they gave everybody approximately a kilogram of pig meat and

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grease and all of this, in a can, and one bread for every individual. And they said that you will go-- watch out for your food because you are going for a long trip.

So we were seven, how I told you. And we started to march, seven people, in the same row, 10 people in a row, young youngsters. And we decided that we-- first of all, we started to eat right away because we were deadly hungry. So we ate approximately the half of the food. And the rest of it we decided that we keep them, as soon as it will be small enough, we will keep them with one individual. So always we will change from one to another because we were marching, and it was hard to carry the things.

So we started the march. And mostly, at night, we had to go on the roads. And the daytime, we were put it in some big places, mostly in the farms, the farm areas where they had big, big for hay, big places to keep the hay.

Now, the first-- we went one day, one night really, because afternoon, we left Auschwitz-- we went one night. And I don't have to tell you that there were a lot of old people, a lot of sick people who couldn't go. After a while, they started to get back and the SS around us. And as soon as somebody stepped out or stood at back, they shot them right away in the head.

So that was a deadly march till we ended-- I don't know the name of the station or the-- it was a Polish place where they embarked us on open train cars, on which I think so they were transporting coal because Silesia is a big coal mining area. And it was empty, you know. And one third of the place was occupied by 2 SS with a tent on the top. And the 2/3, we were approximately 150 people there.

And they even made joke from it how we can be piled up to go in most of the people in one car. So you had to sit down who was at the bottom and sit one near the other one, then another row, and then another row, all the way up to the top. Now, here who was down, it was suffocating. Who was up, it was freezing because it was January. And in Silesia, it like in Siberia at that time.

So this was one of the worst five days in my life because they were a few who were from Hungary who were friends. They were a few from Greece. They were a few from Germany. They were-- so they tried to maintain each other lives because it was a different nation's Jew. They were keeping together their own people. So it was a fight for life what you can't imagine.

How did you do it? What did you tell yourself?

We have to survive. That was the only thought. We have to survive. And keep the food, what we had. So it was--

At the end of the five days, where were you?

At the end of the five days we arrived in Gross-Rosen and approximately 50% of the people who weren't thrown out by the SS. When we were going, they killed a lot of people with the rifle butt because they didn't like the noise what we were making. Because this people were dying, they were making noise. We were making noise. So approximately 50% was dead.

How often would the train stop?

We didn't stop. The train didn't stop. Only in the outskirts of-- and after that, the food was gone, you know. And we ate only the snow if we were lucky enough to get on the top what fell in.

So now, you're in Gross-Rosen.

Yeah. Gross-Rosen, Gross-Rosen was built how I saw perhaps for 5,000 people. It was a concentration camp. It was carved in step by step, like some barracks in every step. It was like steps are in a mountain side. And down in the valley was the crematoria. And they were jamming there because from different parts, how the Russians came from different parts, they were people there like us, they were jamming approximately 10 times so many people there for how many

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people was made.

Now, there wasn't any crematorium-- any gas chamber for extermination. They were exterminating in the Revier, in the hospital, so named hospital, with phenolic injection, the people. It was also a long building. In one side, you could get in. And in the other side, every morning, they were at least 500, 600 Muselmanns.

The name of Muselmann, it came when you are close to starving to death, those very skinny skeletons. Those, we named them Muselmann. I don't know why. And staved people, like almost all of us, naked, it was like a haystack it was, and that cold, frozen, body stack there, you know.

Now, there for three weeks I was selected in Sonderkommando. So we had to take two dead people, pulling them down in the valley, because it was down all the way, to the crematorium. That was our job for three weeks.

When you say our, yourself?

We were many people. We were-- my friends were selected because we were younger people and fairly with muscle. We were very skinny. But we had muscle on our bones. And that's what they were looking for. And there what I did for 3 weeks.

You actually transported the--

Transported the dead, the cadavers down to there.

What did you do in terms of your thoughts? How could you live with that?

I didn't think there. I didn't think there. We had a job to do. I pulled by-- I even didn't look at it because I was afraid that I will find somebody from my family.

And also the thought that we knew that the Sonderkommando will be exterminated at the end. Now, our luck, I think so, I can name them luck, that the Russians were chasing this column. They were chasing-- they were getting closer to Gross-Rosen also.

And then one day, it was a big bombardment. And the cannon fire was very close to the concentration camp. And I told you before that the Germans weren't heroes when they were in danger, only when they were feeling superior. So it was a big chaos.

And we, with my friends, with whom we were there, we were still alive five, I think so, five, four, we were abandoning the place. We were taking down bodies. And when the bombardment and all the cannon fire came, we saw that there was a big chaos. The SS started to yell that everybody in the marching column to go. And we sneaked in the column. And that's what saved our life.

Now, I don't know if they killed those in this chaos, you know. But we knew that we will be killed, that was our thought, all the way on the three weeks, you know. So we ended up in FlossenbÃ¼rg from there.

Do you recall when this was by means of date?

This was approximately-- from Gross-Rosen, we went five days by train from 18th of January. And after that, we were three weeks at Gross-Rosen. So this was at the end of February, or the beginning of March.

When was your liberation?

In May 6--

And where were you--

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In '45. Near Passau and Pocking. The Americans liberated me.

So you had moved from Gross-Rosen to FlossenbÃ¼rg--

To FlossenbÃ¼rg, and from FlossenbÃ¼rg to Pocking.

To Pocking. And what did you do at Pocking?

At Pocking, we were taken 2 or 3 kilometers from the place where we were to build an airport.

And in fact, that's what you did, or participated?

How much power? I was 75 pounds when I was liberated, almost 19 years old. And I had the typhoid. I had this brain typhoid from the lice. And I was almost unconscious when-- it was always--

It's my understanding that just on some conversations that we've had, your wife went through Auschwitz.

Yes.

But, of course, at the time it was happening, you were unaware of her presence.

No.

You talk about it with her now?

Only when we are talking with other friends with whom they were-- unwillingly, it comes up the-- and we stop right away. We are not talking about the concentration camp. When we realize, some of us realizes that this concentration camp time again, then we stop.

Mr. Robicsek, I want to thank you very much for spending this time with us this afternoon. I can't help but ask what I would consider to be a closing question. You were separated from the rest of the world because of your religion, for lack of a better description, Jewish religion. What is the source of your faith today? How strong is your faith today?

I am not religious. I am more Jew than I don't think so anybody else can be. I am very strongly and I think so my family also. And I am human. I love everybody who is human, who is not a cruel, bad person, because I know what it means to deal with cruel, bad persons. But it didn't change my faith in humanity. Only I found out that the strongest human feeling is not love. It's hate.

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