

Edith, when you were describing the incident involving your father, do you recall if your sister was present at that time?

No. My sister was not there.

Was that strictly by accident or was it designed?

By accident. Strictly by accident I guess.

Now these two individuals, or at least two individuals who you described as being best friends.

Friendly, very friendly neighbors.

You've known them for a number of years?

All our lives.

All your life. And they were Hungarian?

They were Hungarian.

Were they dressed in uniform?

They had a certain band like helpers for the police or something like that. They had a certain name which I can't recall. These were like helping out the police, following through orders.

To your recollection were a number of the young people in that age group, 18, 19, 20--

Yeah, they were all young, all young.

Were they the individuals typically who would be involved in the policemen's helpers?

Yes, right.

As that type of duty?

Yeah, there was volunteers, by the way volunteer only. Yes.

Did they consider themselves to be responsible not only for obeying laws, even the new oppressive laws that we had previously described, but also in addition to that, to act as monitors of culture, and monitors of thinking, and monitors of people's activities? Did they take that duty on themselves?

Yes. They were very fond what they-- they were very proud what they were doing. As a matter of fact, it was like an honor to them that this they could follow through orders, and take it in their honor. They did on their own. I mean it wasn't exactly-- I mean, they didn't tell them exactly what to do. Whatever they felt like, they felt like beating you up or they felt like being rough, whatever, they were very-- they just did it on their own. They were delighted to do that. It was a pleasure for them.

These same individuals, having known them, having been friendly with them at some time in the past, did there come any instances, any times when you were in a position, you were people that you knew, to ask these people, why are you doing this? We used to be friends. We've gone to school or we've gone to activities together. And now you're doing this to me, or my family, or my cousin, or my uncle, or what have you. Why?

Did you ever have opportunity to ask?

No we really never did. We never came across with them, only for bad experiences. They no longer were-- we were isolated. And they were no longer between us. They were just following through orders, like nothing would ever happen, like we would have never known them. They were completely in another side of the section of the city. And we were in one section between the Jews. And they were between the Gentiles. I mean it was completely divided. At that point, you had absolutely no contact with them, unless they came and they beat you up, and they followed through orders.

Now recalling now that you're in the basement area of your residence was it?

Yes.

And that's where the safe was kept.

Right.

Your father had been beaten in your presence.

Yes.

I take it you feel that they did that on purpose.

Right.

That they did it in your presence.

Right.

Do you believe that was to cause your father to break down or to cause you to break down?

To cause me to break down because at that point already my father had gone through, I mean it wasn't the first time they did that to him. It was just on purpose to torture us, the family, the kids. And there was an incident again I remember that they called, and they asked me to go and bring my father something to eat because he was hungry. And my grandmother, of course, my mother wasn't there. They were all in the police station. So my grandmother was cooking something. And I took a loaf of bread, and I don't recall what else.

And when I got there, my father couldn't stand up on his feet. They were all black and blue and swollen. He was completely tortured and beaten up. And I handed to them. I saw my father like 10 feet away. They didn't want me to get close to him. And I hand it to this policeman, the food. And he took the whole thing. It was a pot of soup or something and a loaf of bread, and threw it right into his face. And they told me I could go.

I mean they all did that on purpose, everything they could do to torture us, besides him and my mother, us.

This was at the locale that you described as the barracks or police station?

Right.

OK. The local police or was this a national or area police?

It was all local.

And were these same individuals the individuals who were involved in the beating of your father in your presence? Were they the same individuals?

Yes, they handled everything. It was like being in the city hall, let's say.

What I mean to ask, Edith, is whether these individuals shall we say, had your father assigned to them, and therefore your father and your father's family would be their responsibility?

Right, everybody had someone to handle that family. Right. Right.

So that these two or more individuals who you've known?

Yes. And your luck.

Made sure that they took good care of my father. That in fact, when they took us to Auschwitz, that day when it came that we had to go and they put us in the boxcars, and we were still hoping that maybe my father will get-- we should be together and we'll meet again, and that never happened.

When your father was taken away--

Yeah.

And you've described one incident where you brought him some food, and they threw that at him. Did you ever see your father at any time after that?

No. Not anymore. So the last recollection or scene if you will of your father, was that incident involving the food?

Right. Which it was a horrible scene that I shall never forget.

Were you by yourself or your sister, was she with you?

I was by myself.

Where did you go from there?

I walked home.

By this time, were you in the ghetto?

We were in the ghetto. And I walked back home.

When did you move from the area of the business to the ghetto itself?

No. That was all, it just so happened which was very unusual, that the ghetto, the business and the house where we lived and was in all one section, in one place. And the store was in the front of the house, and the ghetto officers, they took the office, the ghetto office. And they chose our place. So I happened-- they came. That's why they came back and forth, and I've seen them. But we weren't going to talk. Nobody talked to anybody. We were afraid to talk to anyone.

It was in our house, part of our house and our property.

So you didn't have to actually move to another residence?

No, we did not move. And that would be just and your sister? Just my sister and I.

And your mother.

And my mother and the bakery where that all went on. At that point, there was no longer a bakery. They took our

business away in 1943 was the last time they closed our business. So the bakery was quite a large place. In the bakery, there must have been about 20 families living. And that was part of the ghetto in our bakery. But I lived still in our own bedroom in our own home.

For all the years that your family had operated that bakery, certainly there were times where you had some very loyal Gentile help, employees.

Right, right.

Did any of these individuals provide you or your family with any assistance?

Nothing whatsoever and they pretended that they never knew us.

Did they ever refuse you if directly asked for assistance?

We never asked.

Not once?

You see, it's hard to believe. Because once we were in the ghetto, they no longer came around to the ghetto. The only thing they came to the ghetto--

I understand. How about just before ghetto itself?

Before the ghetto, well, before the ghetto we didn't know what was waiting for us.

You didn't need to ask.

We didn't need to ask.

And by the time the ghetto was around, what the ghetto really was all about that you were not supposed to go out and no one was supposed to come in. We were in the ghetto, us. The only people who came in is for certain reasons. They came in for torturing you, or punishing you, or whatever.

I remember one incident that you see every window facing when you were in the main street, and you lived in a main street, every window to the main streets had to be painted with paint that you should not be able to look out what's going on in the main streets. So there was no way of looking out and see what's going on the main streets.

So since the ghetto, the office, the officers who were handling the ghetto were in our house, one time they were not there. And I sneaked out to see what's going on in the main street in the front. And that was right in our home in the front of the house in another room, which was like it was the business. There was the bakery where the store was. That they took over that place for the ghetto, for the officers to handle. And no one was there. They all went for lunch.

And I looked out. That was the only way for me to see without a painted window, because everything you were not allowed to see what's going on. You were all isolated. So I saw two of my girlfriend's brothers, which they were brilliant, handsome looking intelligent boys, like 22 years old. And there was those Hungarian young fellows who were like helpers for the police, and they were riding a bike.

They were on the bike. Now there were the two young guys, there were two of them riding bikes. And they had those rubber sticks. I don't know. So in the meantime, two of those brothers, each of them was riding a bike. Each of the Gentile boys were riding the bikes. The brothers were running one with one bike, and the other. And they made them-- they rode the bike very fast, and the Jewish guys, the boys, were running.

And while they were running, they were going faster and faster and faster with the bike. And they wanted them to run as

fast as they could ride the bike. And if they didn't go fast, they would keep beating them up and beating them up. And they kept falling down. They kept dragging them up. They kept running and running. They had to run and they wanted to make him run faster, because you could ride a bike faster than you could run. And if they didn't perform, they kept beating him up. That's the scene I saw in the ghetto once, a horrible scene.

I take it there wasn't much time that you spent out of doors? There is no way you spend out of doors. You couldn't. You were just so in, and that's all. And there was so much commotion going on. There were so many people. There was no room for anything. You had to wash clothes. You wash by hand. There was no washing machines. You tried to do some cooking.

Well, I didn't have anything to do with it. But I watched in the bakery, all these 20 families there. It was so much going on and you didn't want to be with anyone. It was nothing but trouble everywhere you looked. Everybody was depressed and crying.

Did there come a time in your experience in the ghetto, and we'll move on to Auschwitz momentarily, but in the ghetto itself I understand I think you said that you were there some six weeks.

Yes.

Before you were taken to Auschwitz.

Right.

During that six-week period was there sufficient time for an order to develop? By order I mean someone who would take charge, someone who would be responsible for food, someone to be responsible for the children, someone to be responsible for other accommodations such as sleeping. Things of that nature, was there the institution of an order, a system?

Well, every family took care on their own family. There was families with little children. I mean there were people with babies, and infants, and whatever you have. I mean everyone tried to take care of their own as much as they could.

How about taking care of your neighbor's children? There wasn't, no. There was no-- I mean you couldn't take care of your neighbor's children?

By neighbor, I mean other families that might be living in the same home that you're living in? You described for example the bakery having some 20 families.

Yes, well there was so much commotion going on--

Everyone for himself everyone.

Everyone, there was no time for anyone else. Everyone tried to make it, survive, from day to day on daily basis.

Who was the person with the greatest deal of leadership or authority who lived in your bakery during your ghetto period?

I tell you, I just have no idea what went on. I was so involved with myself, and so troublesome, and so worried about my parents that I just never got involved what's going on next door to me. I just didn't know anything what's going on. I was so worried about my parents day and night. And I was thinking they probably will come for me and they will come for my sister. That's all I was, every day, every night I went to sleep, I cried myself to sleep.

How about your sister? How did she whether?

The same, she was even worse than I. I mean we were just, that's all we're doing sitting and crying.

Did you obtain any comfort, and I use that word somewhat loosely, any comfort or solace or advice from any community leaders such as rabbis?

Oh, they were taken away.

When was this?

The same time when my father. Any leader, anything who amount to anything, anybody who would have come and comfort you or helped you in any shape or form, they were first. That was that night that they came and take. And that one night, particular night, they went to everyone. They made sure they took everyone away who was anything or anybody who could be helping other people, or any took away.

So all chances of organization were removed in that single sweep that one night?

That night was everything, a nightmare like we were lost. First of all, they were all women, mostly women and children. Of course in my case my parents were both taken away. But mostly they took the men. So what could one woman do for another one? She was worried about her husband, about her children. What's going to be tomorrow?

How were provisions taken care of, by way of example food, clothing?

It was tragic. It was tragic.

Well, describe the course of events then. Well at that point, when they came to the ghetto, people were just taking-- and they had to leave your home and you were probably taking your clothing for your children. How much can you take? Because you're going to be in a small little place. You might be 10 families in one room. There was just so much you were able to take.

So probably, of course, I didn't move out from my house. But what good did it do? I had other things happened to me. I had my clothes. I had my food. I didn't eat. There was no one to cook. But as far as the families, they were struggling. They had to wash every day because they probably didn't have enough clothes. And it wasn't like washing machines, like I said, and a little bit of food. It was already very bad times.

Were you losing weight yourself?

Oh, yes, we lost. Everyone did. I mean I was, by the time I went to Auschwitz, I really didn't know how I made it. Because it was actually we were waiting. We were hearing rumors that they were going to take us away to working camps. But it was so bad at home that I figured nothing could be worse. Because at least we'll be together. The whole thing is being with my mother and father. I was a child. No matter where we be, we will be with my mother and father.

I didn't know where it's going to be. Because at that point I didn't know that I'm no longer going to see my father. I wasn't aware of that. So everybody was sitting and waiting for the time to come to take us away, because it was bad for everybody. It wasn't normal circumstances to live 10 families in one room. They figured nothing could be worse.

Did you have access to any information as to how the war was going?

No.

By 1944 of course--

Nothing.

--the German advance had been stopped and the Allied advance had begun the year previous.

Yes.

No?

No communication from the outside world.

Well, look at it from the other point of view. Were you made aware of the German advances? Were you told that, by way of example, that the German army had gone very far into Russia?

No information whatsoever. No information. So you had no idea where the front was?

Now, if you had a radio, a radio was communication in Europe. I mean there was no television. As a matter of fact, a radio was a big deal. Not too many people had radios. Believe it or not, a radio was a big deal.

Sure.

Newspapers and radios were a big deal. Now at that point, they would make sure. Now when I say you didn't have a radio, that means they came to check every day and see. If they found one, you were in trouble. They would beat you up and kill you. So there was no radios. People gave everything up just to be left alone in peace.

So at that point, no. We did not know what there is. We knew there was war. We knew Hitler was in the war. That was before. But when the ghetto, absolutely not.

As this was going on, did you believe what was happening to you is the result of the Germans?

Yes. We knew that was the Germans.

Yet everything that you've described, you've described how the Hungarian or the Hungarian element was primarily responsible for your family's personal suffering.

Right.

How did you equate the German and the Hungarians?

Well, because that much they were saying. They were saying they're going to take you away to German camps.

They meaning who?

The Hungarians. They said pretty soon, he says, they'll take you away to German working camps. But it wasn't. Concentration camp, nobody ever mentioned that word. It was working camps. Well, I mean it was so bad that I didn't think anything could be worse.

I honestly tell you that I don't think anyone who was-- now there are people, the Polish people who went, who were in the Warsaw uprising and all that. I'm speaking from my experience.

I take it you weren't unaware that had taken place as well.

No, only until after the war.

Do you believe that what happened to you and the things that were done, perpetrated upon you, the beating of your father and your presence, then moving into the ghetto, the taking away of your possessions, your business, and your livelihood-- do you believe that all to have been a deliberate step by step organized process?

Positively against us. They were very jealous on the Jews. The Jews were prosperous.

They meaning again, who?

Hungarians in our town, the Gentile Hungarians, which they were Hungarians. They resent the fact that Jews live nicely. They resent the fact the Jews were smarter. They were good students. They went to school. They resent the fact that Jews had the businesses. Mainly it was Jewish businesses. Everything was in Jewish hands. And they were prosperous.

And the Gentiles in our town, they were farmers and stuff like that. They were working. They were not in business. They were not involved in the Jews. So they really and truly, since I remember me as a little kid, they resented. We were called dirty Jews many times before all that happened.

At the time that these things were happening to you, at the time, were you able to tell just when you thought today was the worst day of your life, tomorrow got worse? Were you able to tell that there is a plan, that this whole thing is a plan, and what's happening to me and my family is happening pursuant to a plan?

Yes. We knew there was a plan.

Where did you think that plan was going to take you?

We really thought the plan was to take us away from home. We knew it was very bad. And at that point, when they took my father already and all that, so we really couldn't care anymore what's going to happen.

By that time though, by that time, perhaps your neighbor friend who had been to Theresienstadt, perhaps her words came back to haunt you?

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. But it was too late. And we couldn't care less. At this point, no one cared. Our life meant nothing. No longer did it mean anything. I mean, once you're not in your own home, once you are in someone else's, once you're in the mercy of other people to come and kill you, and beat you, and talk to you, and treat you-- and you're no longer are you a normal human being. And at that point no longer people didn't care anymore. They really truly didn't care what happened to them. They really didn't.

We knew we were going to working camps. And we also knew there was a war. And we also were hoping that things will get better. We really truly must have been that naive. I don't know what it was. We hoped things are going to-- and probably there must have been, I'm speaking for me. I was a child and I was tortured. Maybe the older people knew. I don't know. Maybe my father knew something and he didn't tell us. I really don't know.

Were there instances of personal torture that happened to you prior to going to the camps?

That was the worst when my father came home.

In your presence.

And there in my presence, and then when I took-- that was the worst. As far as, no I didn't have any bad experiences in the ghetto, except this one which I thought was the worst. But there was other they did. I heard which I was not involved in, I hear there was girls that they would come, the Hungarian young, like I said, they were in the army. I mean the police. These young people who were in charge and all that, they would come and they would choose the young girls, pretty girls and they would take them away.

And I was not one of them because I was still young. I would say like 18 and 20-year-olds, they would come during the night and they would take them, and they would come home and they would cry, and they wouldn't talk about it. There were instances like that. They did all kinds of horrible things in the ghetto to the Jewish girls.

During this period of time, did you perhaps stop and reflect somewhat and ask yourself, where is America? Why is this happening to me?



Yes.

When this great country that we've heard so much about is sitting idly by?

It's funny that you're saying that. My father, that was 1938, '39, and he read different newspapers. And he had different people always coming to our house and talking about politics. Politics was all my father's life, politics. Always said, I wonder what Roosevelt, where is Roosevelt? I mean what are they thinking? Are they going to get involved?

Because Japan, and the war and the whole thing. And he always said, what happened? Where is America? It was just we were wondering. But that's about it. Yes, many times.

Did you know in 1942, '43, '44 that America was a party or a participant in the war?

No. We knew that they were not at that point. We knew America was always an important thing. I mean President Roosevelt, over and over, what is he going to do? What is he going to do about it or whatever? But we were hoping. We knew that they have a lot to say, more than we did for sure. But we always were hoping that maybe they will come and rescue us somehow and somewhere.

In fact, the part that I was living between the mountains, there were the Russians were pretty close to the borders. We were bordering with Romania and also with Russia in one part of Czechoslovakia. And we were, I remember recalling me, the bombing. So we knew there is a war. And we knew someone is coming close. But we didn't know that Hitler went into Moscow or most all of these things we didn't know till after the war.

And then they kept coming back to them. We figured maybe Russia is going to be coming and helping us or someone. We were hoping, but nothing happened. It wasn't enough time.

You described your city that you were born and raised, Slatfina, as being somewhat of a small city.

In a way, yes.

And highly democratic, a number of institutions, apparently very cultural minded.

Yes, in their own small way.

Do you believe that it was substantially easier to isolate you because of the size of your city, as compared to let's say a city of 100,000?

Oh, no question about it. Because like if you were to come a city like Budapest, or Prague, or major big cities, yes. Because you see, we were like a ghetto in the first place. They knew where the Jews are and they knew every Jew. Now there is no way you were able to go anywhere. No way, because we were that small. It's a very good point you bring up.

Because there a friend of mine from Budapest, she went into a completely different neighborhood, like to the west side here or something, and changed her clothes, and she got papers being a Hungarian. And she never went to camp.

That's why I'm saying we were so small that everybody knew everybody. There is no way you were able to move out. If my father would have left town, everybody would know. That was our problem because we were so small. That every way we moved, there is somebody who knew you and here is somebody who knows you.

If you go to the train station take a ticket, they'll ask you where you go, or a bus station. There is no way we were able to go. We were really trapped.

I suppose in that regard, people are universal no matter where you are on this world.

Right.

Well you've described this six weeks or so in the ghetto. And I take it, it became progressively worse, less food?

Yes.

Less shelter and clothing.

Everything, every day was worse.

How did your mother weather that?

How did she respond to that?

Well, like I said, then they came and took my mother, and she was there for a couple of weeks. And when she got home, she was not very much herself, no longer herself. And she was most of the time very depressed. And that's all she worried about is us. She kept looking at us. She says, you're so skinny and you're not eating. And who is doing the cooking? And meantime, she used to do it. But she didn't.

It was like waiting for something to happen any second, any minute, something will happen, bad, worse, whatever. I knew good isn't going to happen. And every day there was a rumor because to do what they did, the Germans one thing you have to give them a lot of credit, they were extremely well organized. To take and kill 6 million Jews, that's a talent. That takes brains to prepare they took. And they were organizing even to take, to put you in, in those boxcars what they did. Like we had a train station, which many places they didn't.

So that's why the ghetto came in to wherever there was train stations. They planned that out. Because someday they're going to have to go by that train. Where we were going to go? No one knew.

But you knew at the time the fact that there was a ghetto.

We knew at a ghetto there was train stations. But already there was rumors they're going to take us with the train to working camps.

So that when the time came to actually put you in into the train, this was an expected event.

No, not to the point that we were going to go to the boxcars. The boxcars they used to have, the cows and whatever stock, whatever.

But the fact of leaving by train.

Leaving by train, we knew we were going to go by train. But we didn't know that they were going to put us in like cattles.

Because of the condition of your mother, did you or your sister take it upon yourselves to act as her protector?

Right.

There was now, if you want me to go on--

I want you to tell.

That's what happened. So the day came and they told us we have to leave. And just take whatever we have. At this point most people didn't have much because they left already home a long time ago. In our case, of course, they said you're allowed 20 pounds. Everybody made sure they have a good winter coat and good shoes, some jewelry, some money,

whoever had.

You're describing the day that you--

The day, like my mother said, that maybe we should just all have a little money on ourselves, because we don't know where we're going to go. She said we might be separated. We don't know how it's going to be, which we didn't. So if you need for emergency we'll have the money.

Were these thoughts that you or your sister had thought of yourself? In other words, to have money or to have some hedge?

Without money, you were already dead. So money is the number one issue. It was comfort you. It was comfort you. But were these thoughts that you and your sister had come up with or?

No, that was my mother's suggestion. We were very naive. We really were. In fact, we had money in Switzerland, because my father sent out money. And children were not told what years ago they didn't talk to kids about what you have and what you don't and whatever. And I remember my father saying that he sent out some money to Switzerland. But I never had any proof. And there was a lot of money left in Switzerland after the war unclaimed.

Like I have friends who knew that there was a code number, a code number that you could go.

Called a numbered account.

Account right, that you were able to. Because they knew the number account, they knew and after the war they went to Switzerland and they found their money. Since I didn't know what went on, so we were always money was a major thing. And so as long as we had it, we thought we'd take it with us, wherever we go.

When it came time to be taken from the ghetto, do you recall when that was either by date or time?

Yes. It was May the 8th, May the 6th. May the 6th, they took us. So what happened is--

1944.

1944. There was a big modern four-story building, a new school they had built, a very beautiful modern building for our little town. And it was a new junior high school. And they got us all in one place in that school, that one night which was close to the train station. And they got us all in.

How did they come to your house? Can you describe that?

They announced it over the speaker in the ghetto that you're going to leave tomorrow morning. At this point, it was walking distance everything. It was small. Everyone should walk to the school. By the time, that 6 o'clock in the evening, everyone should get themselves together. By 9 o'clock that night you all have to be in the school. And everyone is allowed to take 20 pounds.

So everyone tried to take whatever they thought was the most important necessities that you need. We closed that house. We left. We walked to the school. That night, of course, there was no longer beds. There was nothing. Everyone slept on the floor. I remember it was the first time they built us those modern toilets with flush, not with the--

And when the morning came, every toilet was broken. It was already a disaster. They got a lot of people in this one school, which wasn't that bad. It was big enough, but not for all these people.

How many people would you imagine?

I don't know, a few thousand. So we walked to the station. And as we walked, we saw they start lining you up five in

one row. And we stayed for hours until they got everyone into those boxcars. And we watched people go on the box cars. And they pushed them. And they pushed them in like these were the same young generation Hungarians who took care, the same soldiers. They were not soldiers. They didn't have uniforms. They were like helpers for the police.

And they were still the same people who conduct the whole thing. They pushed you in. They beat you up. They dragged you in. There was old people. There were little tiny babies crying. There were newborn babies. They were old. They were young. And they pushed in as many as they could. I mean you didn't have enough room to breathe. You were pushed on top of each other. They pushed you in. And then we thought that's the end.

Didn't that create some panic in the crowd?

Tremendous panic. Tremendous crying. Outcry. It was horrible. People did not want to go into those boxcars no longer. They didn't. They were beaten up. They had those long rifles. They all had the long rifles. They beat you up. They pushed you in. They dragged you in. If you wanted to go in, or you didn't, you had no choice. They pushed you in.

Now, when you went into this particular car.

And we went into, it was a disaster.

Were you and your sister and your mother together?

Me and my sister and my mother and my sister and I, were pushed in on top of each other. And for three nights and three days with no food, with no bathrooms, but nothing. You want on top of each other crying, hysterical. At this point we knew we're going to the death. We didn't know it was gas chambers. We figured they take us somewhere they're going to kill us.

Was there any one particular thing that caused you to feel that, by way of example, the fact that when you came to the train station and saw boxcars as compared to passenger cars or similar?

Yes, that was it.

Just the existence of a boxcar.

Then we knew it's no working camps. We knew they probably are going to take us a place that they're going to destroy us. They couldn't do it exactly in our town. They're going to take us somewhere, maybe in a military camp or something. And they're going to shoot us. Then we knew. Then we knew this is it. But we didn't know about Auschwitz. We still didn't know.

Did you say your goodbyes at that time to your mother or sister?

No, we were just crying and crying. And my mother was really-- my mother was really not aware very much anymore was going on. She really wasn't aware.

Probably lucky for her.

Lucky for her, yes. Because at that point, she was completely she was unaware. But my sister and I were crying of, course. We were on top of each other. How

Many people were placed in your particular car?

Oh, I don't even know how many people goes in the boxcar. I wouldn't know, as many as you could be on top of each other so you can imagine.

Standing, sitting?

Oh, there were half of them probably dead by the time they got there.

How long was your trip?

Three days and three nights when we got there.

Now, the particular car that you were riding in it was, you mentioned a number of people, some on top of each other standing, sitting?

Oh, there was no room for standing. Laying on the floor, lying on top of each other. There was no room to stand anywhere. You were like a chicken coop, you were on top of each other. I mean there was no way to communicate or talk. There was nothing but cry. And by the time probably I was so frightened, I really was not aware of what's going on. I just figured we were going to die, just a question of time what are you going to do with us and how they're going to do it.

We knew something they're going to do with us. But we didn't know how. But this is the end. We figured this is the end. And we really didn't care. We didn't.

So the fact of death then was not sufficient to panic or to cause you to resist?

No, it wasn't. You thought by that point, we just want to get it over with. Whatever it is, it was so bad that who cares anymore. My father wasn't there. And my mother didn't know what-- my sister and I, this isn't the way of living. This is no way of existence.

Now at what point though, as you're either in that car or sometime before, that you notice as you look around that for the past few weeks and months or even years you have been confined to nothing but other Jewish people? Did that cause you to lose your faith? Did that cause you to question your faith? The fact that you as a Jewish person was being singled out?

Yes. We thought if there was a God, I remember at that point, before we got on the boxcars, there was this rabbi from our town. He did come home. They took him but he managed to get back. They sent him back. And he was saying the last prayer, we should do a last prayer. We were praying. And he also said it was like a superstition or something. He says everyone who has a jacket or a coat should turn it over on the opposite side.

Well, God will help us. He will care for us. He will watch us. And he was doing. We all prayed that one last prayer before we went on the boxcar. We prayed to God. Once we went on, of course, I already in the ghetto, I says there is no God. If he took my parents away and what he did, I absolutely said there was no God. If there would be a God which we talked about all the time, this was God and we prayed to God, how could he-- I mean innocent children, and innocent.

We were not criminals. We didn't commit crimes. We were Jews. And I mean how could they do to human beings? If there is a God, already we start questioning that. We lost faith. We did.

Your three days on the train, obviously that's a very remarkable period of your life. Your mother and your sister, did they survive the trip? We all survived the trip.

As we got to Auschwitz, it was a night in the evening.

By the way, on your way there, were there times when the train was pulled off to the side that you came to a stop, that doors were open, anything like that?

I know we made stops as we went. There was a lot of stops. The reason for the stops they kept picking up more people in each town, and in each village, in each part of the country. Because the trains were so long. Obviously, the trip was not that far. Because this whole country wasn't so, even between the different countries it wasn't as far as California. It

was from here to California. But the stops, picking up more people from more ghettos made it that long, to pick everyone up.

But as far, opening, no.

You knew that they were adding more cars. And you knew who was inside the cars?

Yes.

You were able to hear their screams.

We heard screams, and we heard the whole thing. So we knew every station they had to pick somebody else up. And another one was crying, another one was beaten up. And then it was quiet already. And once we were in the boxcars, you couldn't hear anything when went on somewhere else, because there was a lot of commotion going on in your own boxcar. It was a horrible night.

Can you describe coming into Auschwitz? This was at nighttime?

It was nighttime. We didn't know where it was. We didn't know where we go.

Had you known that you had crossed into Germany at that point?

No, we didn't. Nobody ever announced where we were. In all this time, we never knew where we were going.

Or Poland.

Yeah. When we didn't know. If it was Germany or Poland or whatever. As they opened the boxcars, they open them up. And it was the fastest moving thing I have ever seen in my life. There was Mengele. And about--

Dr. Mengele?

Dr. Mengele with four big German shepherds standing there. And I remember when a big SS, with a uniform, with the boots and all this.

Rider's boots.

Rider's boots. I mean very tall man, and I looked out and I just saw wires, fences, wired fences. Everywhere wire fences, all with wirings. And as they start dragging us from the boxcars, they had to drag people. Nobody was able to walk. As they dragged you out from the boxcars, there was a lot of cry. There was panic and cry.

And I had had my sister and my mother. We hold together. We were holding together each other's hand. My mother says let her-- she couldn't walk. We had to drag her. None of us could, but she was in very bad shape. My mother and there was a little baby crying. My mother touched that baby, a little tiny baby maybe a two-year-old.

She hold hands with that little baby. And Mengele is right in the front of you. And my sister holds onto me. And as we came down, they pushed you, one to the left. They pushed my sister and I, they pushed one way. My mother with that baby, they pushed right away the other way. We didn't know what left is. We didn't know what right. He was there watching every face. Obviously, he had enough experience to tell who is well, and who is young, and who is be able to survive, and who should go.

Like one thing they didn't do, they never separated mothers from little babies. Every mother who had a young child, and till about 10, 12, they kept the mothers and the children, of course. That night they all went to the gas chambers, but they kept them together. So he did it. So they pushed my sister and me to one side and my mother with that baby, a strange baby, to the other side.

As I found myself on the one side with my sister, I said, we can't leave my mother by herself. I don't know what she's going to do. I pushed my sister back to go with my mother. I did it.

Impulse?

Yeah. So that was a very sad thing.

You recall Mengele specifically?

Yeah.

Did you ever see him on any other occasions besides that one?

I saw him on another occasion. So--

Let's go back to that night, that terrible night if we may. How would you describe Mengele? What he was wearing what type-- what he looked like.

Very tall, handsome, young looking. Extremely handsome, tall, frightening. We were very frightened. Very military, I mean like unbelievable striking man.

Did he have Aryan features?

Pardon?

The Aryan features.

Right. I mean blond, real blond, real tall. Young, probably he was maybe 35, maybe. I don't even think he was more than 35 years old. And I mean, a personality like you could never-- I mean you can't forget this face. If I would see him today, I mean, I had went through a lot of SS afterwards that we had to do with. But he was something that you could never forget.

And he was the one who handled all these people who would go to the right and who would go to the left, who would die and who was going to live. He handled that.

So you went in one direction with your sister.

I went in one direction. And that was very painful. Again, extremely, which at that point I didn't know what I did. I just thought someone should be with my mother, because she can't handle herself. I figured, whatever it is, they'll be together. So maybe they'll do better. Of course, and we got that same night, they told us that we have to walk to a certain camp, to the camp area. And we couldn't walk. They pushed us and they got us together. And they said that we should go into a big auditorium, very modern building.

And it was nothing but showers, stall showers, which I've never seen. Big, giant, white tiled, big place, showers. The whole thing was nothing but showers, one big auditorium. They were not separate showers. One big place with showers. And they told us to take all our clothes off.

And at that point, there were Germans, German soldiers, who shaved our hair everywhere. We should take off our clothes and then took a shower. And when we took a shower, they shaved us. Shaved our hair and they shaved us. And there was all our clothes with all the money, with everything--

That's the sweaters.

--down the drain. This is millions and billions of dollars which people brought to Auschwitz, which they collected. They had a system. And they at that point, we were shivering. We were frightened. I can't begin. In a million years, I could never describe you the feeling what we had that night, little knowing where are we going or what's going to be. I only knew about myself and my mother and my sister went somewhere else.

Do you know the name or the locale of the camp that you went to?

Yeah Camp C. It was Camp C. It was A, B, and C. Lager. It's called a lager. Lager A-- were you in Auschwitz, were you in Auschwitz after the war?

Not myself.

No?

So at that point, they gave me two wooden shoes, like clogs, like I can't even see my kids wear them ever since. They gave me a little silk dress, a nothing, junk, with no underpants or anything, just something they gave you to put on you, very little. But your clothes was down there.

This was the late spring early summer time?

Yes.

May.

Yes. And we went into Lager C, which was one large, big barrack. Now on that street, C, it was a long street. And it was 10 barracks. In every barrack, I don't know if barracks is the right word, like a camp. But in each barracks, that's what it was called, were 1,000 girls. It was a girls camp. And there was bunk beds, which I never seen before, bunk beds. Five of them going this way up.

Of course, there were no beds, there were just boards. There was no sheets. There was no pillows. There was no mattress. There was nothing, just something that you could put your head down. And they were 10 in each bed. And we were like five of them like there would be 50 on each. And in one barrack there was 1,000 girls in one barrack.

Of course, in the center, there were Germans. They had their place. They had their kitchen. They had their bedrooms. They had all the convenience. They were the ones who were watching over us. That was Auschwitz.

The Germans who watched over you, male or female?

Female.

And did you notice any difference between the female captor versus the male captor, if any?

They were very bad. They were out there to torture us every second, every moment. That was their job to do.

Were they German?

German women, SS women. They were German SS women. There were also German SS men. But they had another role. The German women were the ones who looked over us every day, every moment. There was times there were German men, like what we did, we were three months in Auschwitz. In the three months in Auschwitz, me particularly, we did not work. All day long we would have to lay on those bunk beds, all day without moving, just laying.

All night we would have to stay like five in a row, it's called Zahlappell. That means there was 1,000 girls. Until they counted all 1,000 girls, until then, they had to overlook everyone had to stand. And when they got through, that was a whole night. Because they took shifts, because they wouldn't be up all night. Of course.



Every two hours, someone else would come and count us. If one was missing or they miscounted, there was another going over, and another going over on purpose.

Well there were people missing. Because they died. They couldn't survive because there were also when they picked you to go left there, there was some of them who were picked to go like to like on our side, to the left side, mothers. Like my mother, if my mother wouldn't have been so depressed she probably would have come because she was young enough to keep. They took them till they were 35, 36, 37, you know even 40 sometimes. They picked you to live. And over 40, they picked you to die.

You were there for a period of three months.

In Auschwitz.

During that three month period, were you assigned any duties?

No, not whatsoever. So that a majority of the time was spent just-- just laying in bed or standing all night up.

Well, with that type of time on your hands, so to speak, it allows the mind to wonder. Did yours?

Yes. We were very, very frightening. We wondered. Because at that point when they separated my mother and me, they said that you'll meet again. In a few weeks, you'll see her again. They didn't say anything. They just said. I says, I want to go with my mother. They says, no, you'll meet her again. You'll see her the next time. And the next time never come along.

So I was wondering what happened to my mother. I didn't know what happened to my mother or to my sister. That's all I was doing is crying and wondering. If they are around, where they are? What's happening? I had no idea what's happening. I only knew what's happening right there in that camp.

Were you made aware of the fact that there was Birkenau?

No.

And purposes of Birkenau?

No. I was not aware until I mentioned earlier my mother had a sister who was eight years older than me, like I would be 18. She would be 24 or whatever. And we were so sheltered. And I was pretty young, a young 18. And I really wasn't aware.

She came to Auschwitz in another time and with another transport. And she was trying to find me for three weeks in Auschwitz in that particular C Lager. Between 1,000 people, she went for three weeks to look for me, until she found me. And when she found me she said, is your mother here and your sister? I said, no, because the Germans said we're going to meet. But they're not here.

She says, you'll never see your mother again or your sister. She says, do you see that smoke out there? She says, this is gas chambers. This is where your mother and your sister is. You'll never see him again. Then I was aware that there was gas chambers. And the smoke you could see the smoke going all the time. I didn't know what kind of smoke. I was not aware.

People who lived through this describe the smell and the odor.

Horrible odor. Horrible. But I did not know what it was until my aunt brought me to her attention. She said this is human bodies that they're burning there. I did not know.

Did you and your aunt spend much time together after that?

Afterwards, we were able to-- she was able. She was older, and she was already there about three weeks before me. So she already start organizing. And she was able to get me to her. See, it was really the point is you had to be 1,000. It doesn't matter which camp, which block you were, A or B or C, as long as there is 1,000 in that particular street, it was 1,000, 1,000 people, 1,000 women.

And so she was able to get me to her place. And I was in Auschwitz for three weeks. And that's all I had was black coffee for three weeks. That's what they served you, black coffee.

We will discuss a few more things momentarily. I believe it's time now for a break.

Yes.