

OK, [INAUDIBLE].

What?

OK. My name is Carol Tobin, and I'm interviewing Malke Weiss. Malke, why don't you tell us a little bit about what your life is like right now, where you live, and so on.

OK. Well, right now I live in University Heights. My husband's retired. I have two kids, two sons that are married. I have more than two kids, because now I have two daughter-in-laws and I have three grandchildren.

Oh. What did your husband do before he was--

He was in moving. He had a moving company, Weiss Movers. He retired about three, four years ago. We just keep busy with the kids.

Do your children live in town?

One of my sons lives in town, yes.

OK. Why don't we talk a little bit about life before the war? What was it like?

Well, before the war, well, I was born in 1927. So when the war broke out in 1937, I was only 10 years old. So you know, it's hard to remember much about that.

Where were you born?

Czechoslovakia in a little town named Izky. The only thing I knew when the war broke out was that we were attending a Czech school. Then the Hungarian government came in. Hungarians came in.

So the Czech schools were just liquidated. Hungarian schools were opened up. So here at 10 years of age, all of a sudden, you end up in a Hungarian school without knowing any Hungarian at all.

How old were you when the war broke out?

If I was born in '27 and the war broke out in '37, '38, I was between 10 and 11 years old then. So that was already traumatic experience for kids. We couldn't speak. We didn't speak any Hungarian. All of a sudden, they put us in a school, and they brought in Hungarian teachers.

All the officers then Hungarian. All the officials were Hungarian. The police was Hungarian. But the population didn't speak any Hungarian language. The population didn't know any Hungarian at all.

So that was one of the experiences. By the time we learned to speak the language, the war was very much in progress by then. We were very close to the Polish border.

I guess at that time Russia invaded Poland. Russia came into Poland. So a lot of the Polish army and also the civilian population started fleeing the country. They were going through our town because we were so close. So that was the first we ever saw refugees, that's how far back I saw refugees, going in wagons with kids and this sort of thing, and all that.

What did your town look like? You say it was a little town.

It was very little. What I can remember about it is that there was a big river and then there was a street and the other side of the street with the houses all lined up in one row.

You lived in one of those houses?

I lived in one of those houses. That's what I still see sometimes, if I try to remember what it looked like, that's all I can remember about it.

Was it a house like what you live in now in University Heights?

No, not really. It wasn't. It was built of wood, come to think of it, like houses now. But it was one story, and it was much smaller, naturally.

We had a garden in front of it and in the back. We had barns. We had chickens and geese. We had horses and things like that.

My father was a merchant. He had a store. We had a grocery store. But we grew our own vegetables, like everybody else did, also, and things like that.

What did the people in the town do? Were they all little shopkeepers and farmers, merchants?

No. They were mostly farmers, mostly farmers. Some were shoemakers, tailors, shopkeepers, teachers. Like I say, there was the police, but usually not town people. The police were brought in from Hungary, so were most of the officials, the judges, the teachers, even. That's it.

Were there a lot of Jewish people in the town?

Yes. As far as I would judge, because I'm not really sure how many, but maybe, for a small town, maybe we were, like, 3, 400 Jewish families, which is a lot of families. Because in those days, we had a lot of children. Each family, maybe, had six, seven.

We were four. We were kind of the smallest family that I can remember. We were four kids.

What was it like growing up in the town? Was it a happy childhood? Were you carefree?

Up to the time that the war broke out, yes, of course. The family was very close. Everybody knew everybody.

Both my grandparents lived in the same town, uncles and aunts, and neighbors. It was very friendly. And yes, it was very happy, except, like I say, the first trauma started when they closed the schools where we were speaking Yiddish and we were speaking Czech and we were speaking Russian also because there was a lot of Russian-speaking people living around there.

We didn't know any Hungarian and never heard of it. All of a sudden, we were in a situation where you couldn't talk to your teacher, you couldn't go into an office and talk to anybody. They were very harsh.

Did you understand what was happening?

As a child, as a child, it was sometimes exciting because the soldiers came marching by with bands, and singing, and things like that. But you know, like children. Our parents were there, somebody there to take care of us, and to provide.

I don't remember anything very unhappy about anything until, really, '44, when we were really taken out of our homes and shipped to a ghetto first, then to Auschwitz from the ghetto, where we were separated completely, when the real trouble started.

A little bit more about your family, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

I had two brothers and a sister and my father and my mother.

Were you the oldest one?

No, I was the second oldest. I had an older sister, and I had two younger brothers. I'm the only survivor, though. They never came back. Nobody else came.

Oh. Would you say that your family was comfortable, or well-to-do, or poor?

Just comfortable, but like I say, it's completely different. You can't judge by American standards, like I told you before. Being poor in America is almost equivalent of being rich in Europe, in those days.

We talked about it before a little bit. I told you we were comfortable. We weren't hungry. We had a house to live on. We had clothes to wear.

So we were comfortable. There weren't any luxuries, probably didn't exist. At those times, maybe America didn't have as much luxury as they have now, either.

Cars and televisions and telephones were nonexistent in the small towns, especially. If you wanted to make a telephone call, you had to somehow notify the people, write a letter telling them that you'll be calling. Go to the post office, make arrangements that you're going to be calling at 1 o'clock in the afternoon and be at your post office, you know. So that's how you made telephone calls in those days.

Did you have responsibilities around the house? How did you help your parents?

Everybody had responsibilities around the house. We went to school from 8:00 to 2:00 in the afternoon. When you came home, you had lunch, then whatever was assigned to you. I never remember my mother washing dishes or scrubbing the floor.

My sister was two years older than me. So she had a little more than I did. Helping in the kitchen, helping in the garden, helping in the yard with, like I said, we had chickens and geese. They had to be fed and taken care of. Everybody had something to do.

Did you have a lot of friends?

Yes. Everybody had a lot of friends because the whole town was friends, was small. Everybody knew everybody else.

There were only two schools. One was teaching Czech in the Czech language. The other one was teaching Russian.

Most of the Jewish kids went to the Czech school. So we all knew each other. So everybody's friends.

Was the synagogue important in your home?

Yes. We were Orthodox, my parents. The whole town was, really.

It wasn't such a big mixture of people with different ideas about religion. Everybody knew that they had to keep their religion. Everybody kept their religion.

Naturally, Saturday was a holiday. Everybody kept it. What you did in your own home, I mean, what degree, how many times you prayed a day, nobody checked. But everything else was everybody almost the same [INAUDIBLE].

What kind of entertainment did you have?

You know what? Then, when we were children?

Yes, in the town.

Just playing. I don't know. We didn't have any store bought toys. But we were never bored.

We got together. We got together, just a group of kids outside, going swimming. There was a big river in the middle of things.

I don't know. Went sled riding in winter. We went swimming in summer, playing hopscotch. We weren't bored, I'll tell you that.

I don't know. I sometimes discuss it with my kids. Not now, but when they were small and they said Mom, there is nothing to do.

With all the television and all the toys and all the activities, they were bored. I don't ever remember being bored, maybe because we were all so busy, housework, schoolwork. There wasn't that much free time.

What did you like to do as a little girl growing up? What's the name, again, of the town?

Izky.

How do you spell that?

I-S-K-Y.

Izky.

Mhm.

What did you like to do in Izky?

Getting together with my friends and play. School, we had plays in school. The school used to put on plays for us.

Concerts, we used to go on a lot of outings with the school together. Go, maybe, out of town and meet up with another school from another town and have an outing, which used to be at least twice a year, which was very exciting. Going visiting family, visiting your grandparents.

What did you look like?

Me?

Were you healthy?

Yes. I still am, after all that and I'm still healthy, yeah, very, very little. There was one doctor for the whole town. I don't think he was very busy, either.

General children's diseases, maybe measles or chickenpox, or things like that. I don't remember anything else.

Do you remember any anti-Semitism growing up before you went to the new school?

No. We all grew up together. We all played together. We were neighbors together.

There was never any animosity between any of us. We didn't know the difference, except that we kept Shabbos, and they kept Sunday. Their holiday was on Sunday. That was about the only difference that we knew.

That we kept a kosher house, and we knew that we are not allowed to eat in a non-kosher house. But they were allowed to eat in our house, and they did If we came home from school together.

When did you start to notice things were changing?

Like I said, as soon as the schools changed, as soon as we were taken out of that environment that we grew up with and stuck into completely something alien. Since the war was on, they were trying very hard to indoctrinate us. That the Czechs were no good, and they are good, and they are the real nice people. They weren't.

And you can't convince 10-year-old children that they are. They sense when it isn't. It was too much.

We grew up in a Czechoslovakia which was a democratic state. We spoke Czech well. We grew up with them. We were indoctrinated then that Czechoslovakia is our country and we were very patriotic.

Then all of a sudden, somebody tries to tell you, well, that was all wrong. Now Hungary is really the mother country. Hungary is really that belongs here.

Were your parents upset about this?

Yes. My parents were. All the grown ups were upset because the grown ups knew that it's not going to be good. By that time, they knew. We as children then that it's no good, that already in Czechoslovakia, deeper into Czechoslovakia, and in Germany, and in Austria, and in Poland already, big trouble started for the Jewish people.

They were confiscating their businesses. They were throwing them out of their jobs. They were closing up. All Jewish education was forbidden.

So they knew, even though we as kids didn't. But you sense that your parents are upset and worried. The whole atmosphere changed right off.

What other things started to happen to you after the school?

After the school, because when you start indoctrinating children, that's when the other kids, the non-Jewish kids started calling us names. Because already on the news, there were anti-Jewish propaganda. It filters down, and kids are very easily influenced.

How did you feel about that, when the other kids would--

Upset. How does a child feel about it? Go home and cry, and tell my mother. He called me my name. He called me this, and he called me that.

My mother said don't worry about it. Don't pay any attention. Everything's going to be all right.

War is not going to go on forever. Unfortunately, it did go on forever and ever. It went on way too long.

So how long did you stay at that new school?

Oh, until '44. Actually, not all the way, until '43.

You were how old then? A teenager?

A teenager, I was about 16, 17, 16. They closed. The war in Poland started going bad for them. They started withdrawing.

By then, Hungary joined Germany and they fought together on the same front. It started going bad for them. They started withdrawing.

Since we were so close to the border, everything was filled up with soldiers. They stayed in everybody's home. They confiscated every room. They left you one room for the whole family. They stuck soldiers in every room in your house.

So you were forced to leave your home?

No, we were in one room in our home. We had three more rooms. They were all full of soldiers. In the barn, they were full of soldiers.

They closed up all the schools and they put soldiers into the schools. So we were left with nothing, then. The schools were just disbanded, not only for the Jewish children, for everybody.

That time, my dad decided that me and my older sister, it wasn't a very good place to be with soldiers crawling all over the place. He sent us to a bigger city. It was called Uzhhorod.

How do you spell that?

OK. U-Z-H-O-R-O-D, Uzhhorod. He put us in a profession to learn seamstress, to learn to sew. What would you call it in English, they learn the profession?

Seamstress?

Yeah. We both stayed with a family. He rented a room for us with a family. We stayed there from November of '44 till about April.

And in April, we went home for the Passover holidays. Then we never went back anymore because then they started deporting. Then they started already deporting the Jews. That was the end of my education.

So you stayed in Uzhhorod.

For about half a year, yes.

What happened after that?

When we came home for the Passover holidays, like I said, all of a sudden, by the time we got home, Jews were supposed to wear yellow stars. It said Jew on it. You weren't allowed on the buses or on the trains.

You weren't supposed to leave your house, just for so many hours a day. There was a curfew. So we stayed home. We stayed home for over the holiday.

And by the end of the holiday, by May 1, they started gathering the Jews together and just shipping them into a ghetto. They designated a few little towns or a part of each town as a ghetto. They took all the non-Jewish people, made them move out of there.

They put a fence around it. They just herded all the Jewish families into there with whatever you could take with you, whatever you could carry. We stayed there for about a month.

You and your family?

Yeah, me, my family, all our neighbors, and everything.

What did people think when that was happening?

What did people think? Nothing. You are in shock, and you don't think. You do as you are told because you see a bunch of soldiers surrounding your house with guns and you have a bunch of children crying and everybody's screaming and everybody's hollering at you. They weren't hitting the kids, but they were hitting the grownups if they didn't move fast enough, or the old people, pushing and shoving and hitting.

So what do you do? You just do whatever they tell you to do. We got together in a big school building. They brought trucks. They got everybody on the truck and just started going.

Nobody dared to ask anything because nobody was going to answer. If you asked a question, all you could get is a good smack with the butt of a rifle or something over your head.

So then we got to this other town. Everybody got out. They assigned everybody, so many families to a room, and all that. You had to fend for yourself. Whatever you brought with you, that's it.

We were there, I think, about a month, if I'm not mistaken, not much more than that. Then they started coming and just taking people. Now this section of the ghetto. They called it a ghetto, the first time I ever heard the expression of that.

They started taking people away. They said you are going to work. You are going to be resettled in Germany and here and there.

So they just took this section. Then they took another section. That was that.

So it was towards the end of May when our turn came. We all went. We had to walk about 20 kilometers to the railway station from there. Again, you took whatever you could carry. My brother, one was only 10 years old.

But you were all still together at this point?

Yeah, at that point, we were all still together. Then we knew that there was big trouble. Because the way they herded us into cattle things without any consideration whether there is room. They just took so many.

They just piled you in there. You could see that they didn't care whether you survived or not. So you knew that it's bad.

I don't remember how long we traveled. I really don't. We were jammed together like sardines.

Were you dressed properly? Was it cold?

No, it was in May. It wasn't that cold. If anything, it was hot because you were pressed together like sardines. You couldn't sit. You couldn't stand. You couldn't lay down. It took at least two, three days.

What about go to the bathroom, huh?

They stopped every so often. They put in pails or something in one corner. And that was it.

Then we came to Auschwitz. Well, we didn't know where we were going. But that's where we were going. We came there.

They stopped the train. Everybody started piling out. There was already not Hungarians. There was already Germans.

They were SS. They were with dogs and rifles. Then everybody knew that we are in trouble.

We just got out. They started yelling go, go, go. So we started going. We started marching, marching.

I really, to this day, am not completely sure what happened. Because first they separated the men and the women. So my

father and my two brothers went one way. My mother, me, and my sister, and I had my grandmother with me, and an aunt who had a little girl about three years old.

All I can remember, walking, and then one of the Germans grabbed me and pushed me the other way. I was so scared, probably so scared that I walked for a while. I assumed that everybody else is walking behind me.

By the time I turned around, I couldn't even see anybody. I could see a few other girls from my town just coming after me. One, two, you know, but I couldn't see where the rest of the people were.

How old were you now?

16 and a half.

OK.

So I just kept going. Because you didn't know what else to do. It was an empty street. You just kept going.

So I slowed down until somebody else caught up to me. I said what happened? Where is Mother? Where is my sister?

They didn't know either. They kept going. Then we realized, as the people were marching by, they just kept grabbing people and pulling them out. We didn't know why. We didn't know where we were going and we didn't know where they went, either.

The only thing you could see that the ones that were going my way, we were all young girls. Some of them who were older said oh, my God. Are they going to put us into some places as whores or something? Why are they picking all these young girls out and sending us a different direction?

After a while, there was a gate. We all stopped after we congregated all there. Then some SS women came, women soldiers, which were just as bad or worse than the guys were.

They formed a column, five in a row. They made a big column of us. They opened the gates, and they took us out. After a while, after marching for about an hour or so, walking, they said you are all going to take showers.

There was a big building. We stopped. Then they said, OK, in, in, in. Everybody in.

Take off your clothes. We took off our clothes. Go in the next room. Next room, they started shaving off our hair. Everybody got shaved off.

What did you think when all this was happening?

You know what being in shock means? You don't think. You just do whatever you're told. Besides, like I said, there wasn't a grown up between us. Maybe the oldest one was, maybe, 20 years old.

At that time, a 16-year-old was not as sophisticated. I was a child. I really was. I was still playing at home. We hadn't the slightest idea what was going to happen.

So after we were shaved, we really did get into showers. We did. They said just put your clothes down. You come out.

You know, everybody tried to make a little bundle not to lose something. Well, when we came out of the showers, we went out of the front door. We never got back to where we left our clothes. We were going straight ahead.

There were some, I guess, other prisoners there. They were handing out clothes to everybody, a dress, a pair of shoes, and whether you were small or little, whether the dress was small or little didn't matter. Whether the shoes fit didn't matter, either. You just got a pair of shoes and a dress and you were marched out again.



From there, they took us into barracks. In there, we met up with a lot of them. Then you realize how big the thing is. You couldn't see the end of it.

It was all barbed wire surrounded with big towers. We were right away told that the barbed wire is connected to electrical outlets, so not to touch it. You didn't see anything else but barbed wires and real low barracks, rows and rows of it.

So when we got in there, they divided. I guess they must have known how much room they have in each barrack left, because they didn't put us in one room, all of us. In one barrack, they divided. As you were going, OK, 10 here, or 20 into this, then into the next one.

So when we came in there, when we realized what was happening, there were thousands of people in there. Already, some of them, after we got to talking, everybody wanted to know where are you coming from, what's going on on the outside world, how is the war progressing. Some of them were there already four, five years.

We didn't know those were German Jews, Jews from deep in Czechoslovakia where it's called the Sudeten Gebiet which was a border. They bordered on Germany. Those people were taken over first. Because when Hungary marched into our part of Czechoslovakia, the Germans marched into the Sudeten Gebiet part of Czechoslovakia.

So those people were there for years. They didn't know anything about what's going on outside. Is the war still on, did the Germans win, are they still fighting, is there any chance they're going to be defeated ever, and things like that. So then, when we realized that this isn't something new, and we aren't going to go to work, and we aren't going to get out of there ever because you could see smokestacks. We didn't know what it was, but those people told us what it was.

Because we asked what happened to your parents? Well, where are your parents? They said they're all dead. Your parents are all dead, too, by now. But you don't want to believe it, and you don't, because otherwise, you would never survive.

So I said, oh, they're talking nonsense. They don't know what they're talking about. Who the hell heard of such a thing? Nobody would do that. They just can't take people and kill them, you know, just like that.

The most worst thing there was there was no food. There was very little food. We were very hungry.

What did you do all day in this place?

You know what they did? They built cots on top of each other, just plain, hard boards. They gave you a blanket. That was it.

You got up early in the morning, while it was still dark outside. They used to come by and whistle. You had to get up and go stand in line.

You used to form columns outside and just stand there for hours and hours. They used to come around and count us. I don't know what for. Where did they think we were going to go, surrounded by barbed wire and electrical barbed wire, and at the gate, there was the SS with the dogs and the guns?

Every day, the same thing. After that, we went back into the barracks. By then, it used to be 10 o'clock in the morning, from 6:00, like, till 10:00. After they counted, OK, dismissed. Everybody back into the barracks, back onto the cot.

They picked a few people to go to the kitchen. They used to bring some black coffee and a ration of bread, or whatever they had. Then you had to line up again. Somebody at the front was gave you your ration of coffee and bread, back onto the cot.

Again, at noon, the same thing in the afternoon, again, stand in line for hours. Stand in line. Stand in line. Counting.

Back into the barracks, that was it.

That went on for about six weeks or two months. Then, all of a sudden, they started choosing people. They said you're going to go. They need people for work someplace in Germany.

Everybody was very anxious to go, because nobody was anxious to stay there. So they took our whole barrack. Some SS men, they lined us up outside.

A big bunch of Germans SS came along. They started choosing people, the ones that looked like they are pretty strong and pretty young, separated us from the rest of them that were there maybe a longer time. Some were sick. Some were weak. Some were older from before we came.

Separated us, took us back to the showers where we were the first time around. Again, we took our clothes off. We went into the shower. We came out the other end of the building.

They gave us another dress, another pair of shoes, a half a bread. They formed a column again. They marched us to the railway station. We got loaded up. We traveled for about 24 hours or maybe a little bit longer.

Were you by yourself without family right now?

By then, I was without family. But I managed to stick to a couple of friends that we knew each other from home. The rest were all people that I just met there.

We came to a place that was called Kaufering. It was divided into two portions. It was also surrounded by barbed wire.

It was new. You could see because there was a lot of ditches. They were digging a lot of ditches. And there was all, like, when construction is going on, you could tell that the thing was dug up, and it was construction going on.

Half of the one part was man prisoners, men, and the other part was women. From there, they made groups. They took some groups to work on farms. Those were the lucky ones because they got to eat. They got food.

Some of them, we were just digging ditches. To this day, I don't know what they did with those ditches. Some of them were still building barracks for-- I guess they must have brought more prisoners in. They were just building. Must have been a new one that they were just making a camp there, a concentration camp, and they were just building it up.

So we were a lot occupied by construction work. If you can imagine 16, 17-year-old ones. They give you a big tool that you never had in your hand and tell you, now dig. You know? Dig.

You didn't know how to hold it. Some of those girls came from towns. They never saw a hoe. Or they never saw how a ditch is dug. They never saw anybody else dig it, let alone that they should have known how to dig.

But there we had it a little bit better. Because the guards were not SS. They were German Wehrmacht, if you've ever heard of them. They had two kinds of soldiers. They had Wehrmacht, and they had SS troopers.

The Wehrmacht was just regular soldiers, who were just soldiers, who were just drafted into the army. Some of them were nice, nicer than others. Which they SS were all very bad. Some times some of them would bring a piece of bread in his pocket and give it to somebody.

What was your job there?

It varied. They didn't let us stick to one. They formed groups. Let's say they took a group out to construction and they saw that some are absolutely impossible, they'll never teach them. They just didn't know how to pick a hammer up or anything like that. So maybe the next day, they changed them and put them on the ones that worked on the farm, you know.

They were mixing us around. We didn't stay there long, either. We stay there for another month or six weeks.

And, again, they started loading us, shipping us out again. That's when I got to Dachau. Then, again, they divided us. Because out of Auschwitz, we were 800. By the time I got to Dachau, we were only 200. We were separated, again, into groups, divided up.

Did you feel sick at that time?

No.

You were healthy, still?

I was still healthy. The sick ones were always left behind. Anybody who didn't keep up with always left behind. They always formed another column, picked the ones that seemed healthy and seemed strong, that they thought that they are still capable of doing some work.

We were, again, separated into groups. Because by the time we got to Dachau, we were only 200 of us. Again, it was a big concentration camp divided into half. Half of it was men and half of it was women.

There they took us out to work. I happened to be on a construction job. What they were building, I don't know.

Now when I see when they build something, I see those big steel bars that are real thin, and they're putting them to reinforce the foundation or something. Well, we were supposed to carry those from one place to, I guess, from the loading, from the thing to the construction site.

That swings, you know? That is long, and it's steel, but it's not stiff. It's flexible. When you pick that up, you need really somebody very strong to carry that because that keeps swinging back and forth. It was stronger than any of us. You could pick it up, but you couldn't really walk with it very far because it kept throwing us from one side to the other.

So then, they finally put, like, 10 people, 10 girls to hold it. Every few feet, somebody had to hold it up. Otherwise, you couldn't do it. So that's what we used to do all day, carry that. And they is doing.

In the morning, you got a cup of black coffee, which probably wasn't coffee, but it looked like coffee. Then when you got out there at lunch, they brought out some soup. They used to give everybody, like, a cup of soup. Then when you get home, then you got your dinner.

So the food was better there?

It was very scarce. It was better, but it wasn't nearly enough. We were always hungry. What happened later on, that it got cold and we didn't have any more clothes then what we got.

Some people's shoes wore out. They were walking barefoot in the snow. They used to put some-- if they found a rag, they used to tie it around their feet.

Then a lot of people died. There already, a lot of people started getting sick and started dying. The ones who got sick, they always said there is an infirmary. Anybody who is sick, to the infirmary.

But you never saw those people again. So after a while we caught on that you didn't go to the infirmary unless you really could not get off your bed anymore and they had to carry you in there. Because those people were shipped back to Auschwitz and destroyed, you know.

So finally, people caught on and word got around. So nobody was just pretending to be sick because we wanted to get out of working all day. Because that was the end. Everybody knew that.

Were the prisoners nice to one another?

It's a funny situation in a place like that. We were very crowded. You were hungry. Maybe sometimes if maybe somebody threw something over the fence, they would try, 10 people get one piece of bread, or one piece of fruit. Maybe somebody got something.

But usually, yes, we got along. We got along. I was lucky. I had a couple friends that we knew each other from home. We stuck together. They used to line us up according to alphabet. My name was Grunshtein. Theirs was Gross. So we kind of ended up always in the same row. That's how we ended up together all the time, because we were usually in the same group. because, like I said, it was going alphabetically.

Two of us survived. Two were sisters, the two Gross girls were two sisters. Only one survived.

Did you ever think about where your parents were at that time, or anybody else?

I thought that my parents are someplace, like I am, in a concentration camp, or maybe working. That's what they told us in the ghetto, that they are going to be resettled someplace on farms because they have very few farm workers. All their people were in the army. They need farm.

I figured maybe that's where they took the older people and the little children because that would be a more logical place to keep a family. Maybe they just singled us out for this type of work because we were young and single. They wouldn't have to worry about families.

No, I didn't. Not for a minute did I believe. I would have never survived had I believed that they are not alive.

I really didn't find out about it till after liberation. I found out about it. I didn't believe it. I didn't believe it till after I came to the [INAUDIBLE], after the war.

Did you think that you would get out when you were there? Did you ever--

No, not then. Then when we were, yes. But by December, or the beginning of January, they stopped building. They left us in the camp for a few weeks.

Then they started sending people out, transporting people out. Then I got to Bergen-Belsen. That was just like Auschwitz.

There was nothing. You didn't do anything. They didn't feed you. They didn't care about you there. They herded you into that place, and that was it.

People were dying left and right. By then, people were much weaker. People were coming from all over. They said that the Germans are being defeated, and they're killing everybody in their path as they were withdrawing. Why they bothered to bring the prisoners from one camp to the other, I don't know.

Even from Auschwitz, by that time, people from Auschwitz came to Bergen-Belsen. Why? Nobody knew.

Said because the Russians took over. The Russians by then liberated Auschwitz. Why didn't they just leave them? For what purpose they brought them there?

Nobody knew. Because they weren't doing anything. They weren't doing any good there anymore. There was no place to work anymore.

When we came to Bergen-Belsen, before we got into the concentration camp, into the camp itself, there were big buildings also surrounded by barbed wire. We couldn't figure out what that was. Then we realized that the Hungarian

army was stationed there, a whole battalion, or whatever, how many of them. They had Hungarian soldiers there. They were stationed there.

That was Germany already. They weren't doing anything, either. They were just there. So you knew that something is going on, but you didn't know why.

There, they were withdrawing. They were just not paying-- they were holding all the prisoners, just pushing them in there, and just leaving them. Without anything, maybe once in two days there was some food at the kitchen.

So everybody was running. That's when the prisoners weren't nice to each other anymore, because everybody was starving. If there was any food, if they could get it, they didn't care who they pushed aside if they could get any for themselves.

But by that time, there were so many dead people all over. I haven't seen in Auschwitz what I saw in Bergen-Belsen. Because in Auschwitz, the gas chambers were away from the people. Unless you got there, you didn't know. You didn't see it.

In Bergen-Belsen, people were dying and just left laying. They just used to take some prisoners and take the corpses out and just stack them outside. There were corpses stacked all over the thing. Then I didn't think that we will make it now.

Did you become numb to seeing those things after a while?

You know what? You almost became kind of jealous for the one who died. Because you figured, well, now you aren't going to suffer.

When you are that hungry, when you haven't eaten for two, three days, you don't care. You figure you are going to die anyway. Better the one who died today. Why suffer another? Hunger pains are very severe.

You figured you're not going to make it. It's not worth it. So you were numb, yes.

You didn't care because you're going to be next. The ones who died weren't hungry anymore. And then that-- and that was that.

One night, it was very dark because there used to be lights outside around the perimeter of the camp. One night, it was very, very dark. Nothing was on. There was no light on or anything.

I could hear planes coming very low. You think now, this is it. Either they're going to just drop a bomb and blow us all up, or something's happening.

Then it got quiet. We had a few like that. A few planes came by very low. Then it got very quiet.

In the morning, when we woke up, somebody started yelling. The Germans are all gone! The guards are gone!

So everybody who could still walk, who could still move, piled out of the barracks. We started milling about, going this way, going that way. You didn't know where to go. You were still afraid to go to the gate, because you never knew. There still might be somebody opening a machine gun at you.

Then finally, somebody came and said the English are here. Some English soldiers are in the camp with some tanks. Some tanks started coming in with English soldiers.

That was it. That was the end of that. Except that I lost about three of my best friends after we were liberated. Because everybody was so weak. Typhoid broke out.

What did you look like then?

I haven't the slightest idea. What happened, that the soldiers came in. Everybody was very hungry. They gave us whatever they had.

They weren't doctors, and they didn't know. But after you haven't eaten for so long, they opened cans of beans. They had warm bread.

They also had field rations. Those were the first hand. But a field ration that a soldier can eat, those people couldn't eat. Most of them who died there died of diarrhea because of the food that they got right away.

So unfortunately, they were trying to help. They killed a lot of people, even after that.

Did you feel happy when you saw them? Or you were too tired to care?

You were too numb, really. I remember somehow some things get stuck in your mind, you know. I don't remember where I put something down an hour ago.

But I remember I had a mother, daughter who were next to me on the next bunk. The daughter was very excited. Mother, Mother, we are liberated. We are free.

The mother started crying. She said so what now? We have no place to go. We have nobody to go to. What are we going to do?

But see, that was a middle-aged woman who had a little sense. We were just, like I said, the young ones. We kind of thought, I thought that I'll go back home.

I thought I'll go home. I'll find my family. Everybody is going to tell about his big adventure, and that's going to be it. I still didn't believe.

How old were you then?

By then, I was going on 18. I was 17 and a half. I was 18. I was 17 in November, and we were liberated in May.

Like I say, at that time, 17-year-olds didn't know as much and weren't as sophisticated as they are now. I just thought that I'll go back home and everything's going to be the way it was. But it never was.

We were taking into account they did the best they could. There was a lot of dead people, a lot of dead corpses laying around all over the place. They had to bury those first.

There was an epidemic of typhoid. People were falling. They were afraid to come in. They had to put in masks and bury the dead first.

They put up field hospitals. Those barracks that the Hungarian army was in first, they converted into kind of a hospital, or things like that. So they took the very sick ones.

They separated. The very sick ones went into the hospital. The other ones were just put into different barracks that they could make, that they cleaned up after the soldiers.

By then, they brought in doctors and started treating people. Depends on what shape you were in, what health. If you were healthy, if you were in good shape, they found a place for you to stay. They made another camp for us to stay in. They supplied us with food. OK.

So where did you go?

After that, they took us to Celle. The English organized this in cooperation with the Red Cross. They picked out the healthy ones, and they just transferred us to another city in Germany where there were only the healthy people. They kept us there till about July.

By the time, I guess, everything got settled in Europe. The borders were defined again. They started registering people, what country are you from.

So they separated us. We were all Jewish, but by which country you came from. So this was a Czech camp, this was a Hungarian camp, this was a German camp, or whatever. They started shipping us back to Czechoslovakia.

So could you believe it was over and that you were going home?

Yes, I could believe it was over. I saw it was over. Because the Germans were gone, so for me, it was over.

Like I said, when I couldn't believe what happened was when I finally got back home. Because there was nobody to go home to. By the time we got to Prague, the train stopped because it was bombed out a lot. The trains were very moving very slow.

We were not top priority. There was still a lot of soldiers being shipped back and forth. Russian soldiers were going back to Russia. Some of them were coming into Czechoslovakia.

We stood there at the railway station for about two days. They brought food for us. They gave us blankets. But we slept in the railroad cars.

Then, already, people who got liberated before us came. You know, they already went to the part of Czechoslovakia where I came from. They came back.

They said don't go back. There is nothing to go for. It's been destroyed.

We were close by the border. The whole town has been destroyed. There isn't anybody there. None of the Jewish families came back. There is nobody to go to.

By then, the Joint took over. The American organizations came in by then with the Joint distributions in there. They provided food and shelter. They tried to put us up wherever we were.

But I still wanted to go home. I didn't want to stay there. I said no. I have to go home.

Were you with your friends at this point?

Till Prague. I still had one of my friends. Because two of my friends that we were together the whole time, one was the sister of the one that came with me. Another one died after we were liberated. They both had typhoid, and it was too late for them. So they both died.

Me and Lily were still together. When the train stopped in Prague, other people who were there from before came to look. They thought maybe they'll find somebody of their families. Every time a train, a transport came in, all those people were already there. Usually met us, came out to the train station and waited to see if they'll find somebody that they know.

She found a cousin, a man. He said you are not going back there. There is full of Russians. It is full of Russian soldiers.

They are very rough. They are raping women on the way. It's very dangerous. There is nobody there. You are not to go.

OK. I think we're going to stop now.

OK.