

The following is an interview of Lotte Salus. It is taking place on February 26, 1996, in Silver Spring, Maryland, and is being conducted by Gail Schwartz. Please give us your full name.

Oh, Lotte Cohen Salus.

And where were you born?

[PLACE NAME], Westphalia on January 31, 1920.

Let's talk a little bit about your family. Who made up your family? Who were the members of your family?

Oh, my parents.

What were their names?

[? Vily ?] Cohen. And my mother's name was Elsa Cohen.

Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Yes, I had eight. We were nine altogether.

And where were you in the list of children, were you in age?

I was the fourth of the last. I mean, well, what do you say that?

The fourth youngest.

Fourth youngest, yeah, yeah.

What kind of work did your father do?

Oh, well, we had a business. Was a small town, not too big, tailoring, but not like here, that do alteration. He made from scratch, like designing, and cutting, and the whole outfit. And I think we had a little-- we sold fabrics also for the garments.

Did your mother work also?

No. No, she was home cooking, raising the kids.

Did your father have a separate store?

No, no, in the house.

In the house.

Downstairs was the business. We had a single house. In fact, I have a picture here.

And upstairs they worked. They made-- oh, they made the garments. It was a big house.

Can you-- let's describe the neighborhood that you lived in.

Oh, it was just one street going from one town to another. One was a small town. It was called Gemen. That's where we lived. And the bigger town was Borken. That was a very big town.

Oh, well, when-- you-- when did you move to Gemen then? You said you were--

From here, I was 2 years old, I think.

You moved when you were 2 years old to Gemen.

I don't remember.

OK, but you were a small child.

Yeah.

And where-- was that near a big city?

Yeah, Borken was very famous, very industrial. Munster-- have you heard of Munster?

Mm-hmm.

It was about 30 kilometers from Munster. And it was about 10 minutes from the Dutch border.

I see. And how would you describe your family? Would you say you were middle class?

Yeah, we weren't rich, no. And it wasn't too good because the Hitler years started. Then the war were there.

Well, we'll get to that.

Yeah.

We'll get to that. We want to talk a little bit about life before--

No, the war before, I meant.

Oh, the World War I.

And then the inflation, and then it wasn't too good.

Yeah. Were there many Jews in this town?

Yeah, there were about 25 families. We had two synagogues.

Two synagogues and 25 families.

Each town had its own.

And about how many people were in the town altogether? Do you know? Have any idea?

I don't remember.

But it was very small.

The one, Gemen, was small. There was a beautiful castle. And Borken, like I said, was much bigger.

They had a-- not a university. They called it gymnasium over there. It's not what they think here of sports.

No, it's an academic high school.

Right.

Let's talk about your brothers and sisters. Were you very close in age?

I think so, for sure. Actually, there were two mothers. My mother was the second wife.

The first mother died, I think, in childbirth. And then my father married her sister like the religious people did, right? And then she had-- we were four children, yeah.

Was your family a very religious family?

My mother was very Orthodox, strictly Orthodox. My father, he could care less. He did everything, but we didn't work on Saturday, on Shabbos.

No, we kept all the-- very kosher. All holidays we kept. And everybody over there, they were all Orthodox.

Was your neighborhood a Jewish neighborhood?

No.

So you had non-Jewish neighbors?

Yes. There was one Jewish neighbor about 10 houses up. Oh, yeah, one across. That was all. [INAUDIBLE].

And as a small child in that neighborhood, did you experience any problems--

No.

--with the non-Jewish neighbors?

Never. We played with all of them.

You did.

Never.

Did you-- well, let's talk about your schooling now. What kind of school did you go to?

Well, I went-- the first two years, I went-- my brother, one brother, my sisters, I think one, the others were [? normal, ?] we went to a Protestant school. And then we, in Borken, there was a private Jewish school. We went over there.

How did you get there?

Walk.

Was it within walking distance?

Oh, yeah. Was about 20 minutes' walk.

What kind of religious training did you have?

We had a lot in this school.

In the second school?

In the Jewish-- yeah. We had-- yeah, in the morning, German, and in the afternoon, couple times a week, Hebrew, not Jewish, not Yiddish, Hebrew. And Saturday, of course, we were off. We were home, went to synagogue. And Sundays, we always went to school, Sunday morning.

What language did you speak at home?

German.

German?

Only German, yeah. We didn't know Yiddish in that part of the world.

Did you have any other interests when you were a young girl, any other hobbies or sports? Did you do anything besides go to school?

No, I didn't do any sports. But we-- the girls were sent to the monastery there, to the nuns, to learn how to knit, how to sew.

And did you do that?

Oh, yeah. My sisters, all of them, yeah, afternoons.

You went to the-- and how did you feel going to the monastery?

Fine. We grew up with them, with that.

Did you feel different?

No. I knew who I was. They knew who I was. And was no different that time, no.

Ah, that's interesting.

The neighbors were all nice, most of them. You know, there were always the-- the real Catholics, they were a little, their behavior wasn't so good. But most of them were all very nice. We didn't know any different.

Were you interested in any-- in music or anything like that?

Like, look, I was-- well, how old was I? That started really 1933, Hitler started.

So you were 13 years old.

And I was 13 years. And there wasn't much schooling anymore. You couldn't do anything anymore. We didn't go to the nuns. Jewish school--

Up to 1933, before Hitler came in--

School, yeah.

--everything--

In Jewish school.

--you had a good childhood. You don't recall any problems--

No, not--

--up to 1933.

No, nothing.

OK, now Hitler becomes chancellor. And what is your first memory of that? You were only 13.

Yeah, my first memory, it was on a Saturday. And they, across the street, the Jewish family [? Claiborne ?] is then-- one is still alive, lives in Chicago-- it was his bar mitzvah on that day. And the SR moved back and forth.

It was a very busy street, only one, like I said. There was no other transportation going. So I still see them going back and forth and singing this Nazi song. That was 19-- yeah, January-- end of January, I think, it was.

Were you frightened?

I guess so, yeah. We didn't really understand, you know? When you're that young, and I remember my father said, this is it. But otherwise, life went on.

Did you have extended family nearby, like grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins?

No, I only met my mother's mother, one grandmother. I never met any grandfather or my father's mother. Vaguely, I think, I met her. She was a tall woman. But I don't know.

So you didn't-- did you have aunts and uncles and cousins nearby?

Yeah, but not in the same town, no.

But you got together with them? Did you get together on holidays?

No, they were too far away.

Too far away.

My mother's family, they were all from the wine-- you know Copelands, Cologne? At that time, I mean, to travel-- every summer, we went as children there. But no.

But my father had a brother in Weseke. And, yeah, he came by a lot when he went to the market. He bought cows and then sold them. And I don't-- you know, transportation at that time wasn't like today. Who had a car?

Did you share a room with any of your sisters?

Oh, sure, with three of them, two in a bed, I think. But nice-- we had nice furniture. I remember they were white, the bedroom furniture. Yeah, we had-- it was very nice.

So you were close to your sisters?

Oh, yeah, oh, yeah.

And what were their names?

Oh, let's start from the beginning. Ruth was the oldest, and Frida, [? Yema, ?] [? Juliane ?], and [? Adit. ?]

And your brother's names?

Alfred, Herman, he was here in this country. That's why I'm here. He passed away five years ago. Alfred, Herman, Leo, three boys and six girls. [COUGHING].

OK, now it's 1933.

[COUGHING] Excuse me.

That's OK. 1933, and Hitler's coming to power, and you're 13 years old. And what was the first change in your life?

You were at this Jewish school. So what happened?

Yeah, but I--

You continued to go to school.

Yeah, but not like here, to finish. They closed the-- and everybody--

They closed your school.

Yeah, yeah.

And how did you feel as a young teenager when your school was closed? Was it very upsetting?

Yeah.

We were-- many children, and there were other children. We came together. And I was only 15, I went away from home.

Where did you go to?

To another town. I was living with a family. And I took care of their baby.

What town was this?

Bocholt.

And how did that-- you took care of the children.

Only the child. No, no, no, they had a woman. And only the baby. I went out with the baby twice a day.

And you were 15 years old.

I was only 15 years old. What else--

What was it like to be away from your family?

Well, it wasn't too good. I didn't like it.

Was it a Jewish family?

Yes. Then they went to Argentina. They move. They left. And then I went back home.

And once Hitler came in, did the neighbors change at all?

Not in the beginning.

Not in the beginning.

No, no.

And what about your father's business? Was he able to keep up the business?

Not much, no. It was very bad. People were afraid to come.

Non-Jews were afraid to come to him.

Yeah. But--

Did he have non-Jewish customers?

Only, he mostly. There weren't that many Jews. Yeah, mostly.

And he always went out every Sunday with this bike-- that's how you did your business-- to the farmers. This is his clients. Well, it took, I think, a couple years till it really got bad.

What were the first restrictions that you remember? What was the next change that you remember? You came back home after working, taking care of that little child. Then you came back home. And then what happened?

And then I went to another town. What was that little village? There was one Jewish family.

And I stayed with them a year and a half. What did I do? At that time, they had a maid. But they didn't work for the Jews anymore. They left.

So I was there. I did everything, even milk the cows. Would you believe it? 16 years I was then.

And I cleaned their house. But they had a wash woman. Yeah, but otherwise, I did everything. It was terrible.

Was this in the town that you lived in?

Little village, another village.

Do you know the name of that village?

Yeah, Ramsdorf.

OK. R-A-M-S dorf.

Yeah. And then how long did you stay there?

Oh, a year and a half.

A year and a half.

Yeah.

And were the non-Jewish-- were there non--

It was one Jewish family.

And what about your contact with non-Jews then? Any problems?

No.

You felt safe? You didn't--

Yeah, yeah.

OK.

That was early, in the '30s.

Right.

I came home. I don't know, was it '36? Must've been. They moved to Holland, this Jewish family. And I went home.

OK, now you're back home. And what was the next thing that happened?

What did I do? I stayed home, nothing. We did nothing.

And what were the restrictions in the town at that point?

Nothing.

You could go out on the street.

Oh, yeah.

It was no problem.

In the beginning--

OK.

--no, there was nothing.

OK, so anything else in 1936 that you recall? OK, now it's 1937. Anything special?

No.

No, OK.

I don't recall any-- not until the Kristallnacht.

OK, but what did your father do when he couldn't work?

Nothing.



So what about how did you live? What about food?

Well, we didn't have much.

Well, did you have enough food?

Yeah.

How did you get--

My uncle in this little town, he was a butcher. And he killed cattle. But that all became less and less.

You just-- we had a big garden. We had a lot of fruits and [INAUDIBLE]. Yeah, and milk we got still. We could just go and by the milk.

And meat-- my uncle gave us some meat once a week.

What was his name? [? Heiman ?] was his first name, [? Heiman. ?]

And his last name?

Cohen.

Cohen. OK, now you said the next big change was Kristallnacht.

I think.

OK, do you remember that time?

Yeah, I didn't go away at all.

What was your-- what did you--

Middle of the night, they came, and they broke all the windows. And everybody--

In your town.

In our house, yeah.

In your house.

And they-- every--

You're 18 years old now.

Yeah. And they took us out of the house and marched us by the burning synagogue. And they put everyone, some kind of a jail they had.

These were all the Jews of the town.

In that town, yeah. And they burned all the-- in the other town, they burned the synagogue, too.

But we're talking about your experience in Gemen.

Yeah. And then by noon, they let the people go. And then they came to our house, and they said, you've got to have these windows done. And they-- one of the Nazis marched up and down in our house. They say it's for security. Well, anyway, a lot of men, and my two sisters and brother, me included, went to Holland.

Went to Holland.

To Holland. Like I said, it was only about 10-15 minutes to the next town, which is Winterswijk, Holland. Well--

Now when did you go to Holland?

When? That was the first time. Then they said, look, let Lotte go to Winterswijk first and tell them that there are a lot of people on their way, especially men. They're coming to Holland.

How soon after--

The same day.

The same day you went to--

The same day. So I went on the train to Holland. And I came to the station, and there were a lot of Jewish people from that town at the station. They already knew.

And when I came, they told me to please-- I couldn't stay. I have to go back. They sent me back to Germany. But meanwhile, the others were ready to go, mostly young men, and I told you my two sisters and my brother. They were little kids.

I was on the way back. And they were going. What happened, these people called the queen of Holland. And the queen said, whoever is in Holland can stay. But I was back in Germany.

So I remember my mother was standing outside. And she saw me come. And she said, you're back.

So then I stayed in Germany. I didn't go back. They, the others, not my brother and my sisters-- my brother-in-law was there at the station, picked them up, took them home to Appledorn in Holland. And they stayed for a while there.

So I was back in Germany. I--

What was it like when you got back to Germany to see your synagogue all ruined? What were your feelings?

Bad. Bad. It was terrible.

Was it a-- were you very frightened?

Yes.

And did you talk things over with your parents? Were they very open with you?

Everybody was upset. And everybody wanted-- it was a terrible thing, I mean. Well, I stayed in Germany for I don't know. I went from there to-- it must have been '38 because I was in Cologne when the war broke out. My aunt lived there.

So you went to Cologne then. You came back, and you went to Cologne.

Yeah.

Who did you go with, just by yourself, or with your parents?

Yeah, by train.

Did you go with your parents?

No. My father went also to Holland over the border with his bicycle, like they said, black, without anything. He just-- and my mother also, she was then with her brother for a while in Germany. We left the house the way it was, I would say.

The one with the destroyed windows.

Yeah.

Did you take anything special with you when you left the house?

Nothing, nothing, no.

Nothing personal?

A few clothes, few-- no, nothing.

And you went to Cologne.

Yeah, I stayed with my aunt, yeah, my father's sister.

For how long did you stay there?

Couple months. And you know all too well what happened. I--

Any restrictions there in Cologne? You were free to walk on the streets?

Oh, everything, anything.

No curfews.

You could go-- no, nothing.

No problem.

No, nothing at all.

OK. Then the next big change was when?

One day a man came. And he said-- came where my aunt lived. This man came.

He says, your father sent me to pick you up to bring you to Holland. So I went with this man. Can you imagine?

Did you know anything about the man?

Nothing. Never heard from him, nothing. But it was wartime already. This man took me.

War had broken out by now?

Yeah.

So this is September '39?

Yeah. He took me. Remember we left the station in Germany, and we walked through the woods to-- and there was this big, big house. I mean, I saw people laying outside. It was some kind of a rehabilitation center, but in Germany it was still.

So we walked and walked. All of a sudden, we were in Holland. And we went to his town, his home. And I stayed a night.

And the next morning, I got up. I couldn't walk outside. They would arrested me immediately for a German to come over. My sister's husband-- I see him still coming-- came from Amsterdam, and picked me up, and took me to Amsterdam.

What was the name of the man who came to get you and bring you?

His name was [? Jule ?] [? Frintour. ?]

And he was a friend of your father's?

No, my sister's husband.

Oh, your sister's husband.

In Amsterdam. She-- I had three sisters living in Amsterdam. They were married, at least two were. The other one, later I think she got married, yeah. All married Dutchmen, Jewish all.

So then you went to join them?

I stayed with my sister. Oh, God, so much went on. And my mother was living in a little town by Amsterdam. And they having me at there. And they gave every Jew permission to stay, the refugees to stay.

So I went there. I only was there over that little, ugh, by the stream. I stayed there, too.

That town's name was what?

Who knows?

You don't know. OK.

There was another Jewish family. They were Russians, Jewish. We stayed with them first.

And then we went to another place. I don't remember how I got from there. I really don't. I went to The Hague.

[PHONE RINGING]

Who's that? What I do?

So you said you went to The Hague? Yeah. From Amsterdam, I was in this, it was called [? Hoistenfeiver, ?] a big-- be in the woods, a big mansion. And they were all Jewish children or teenagers. At that time, I was 18.

And I stayed I think until May, from January something till May. So then I went--

What did you do when you were there?

Nothing.

Nothing during the day.

We did nothing. No.

And where were the children from?

German, all German.

These were German Jews.

Children, yeah.

And what was the age? Do you know the age of range?

I forgot.

Little ones?

They were all youngsters. Not that little, but they were all youngsters. They were all single children.

And you were the only one from your family?

Yeah. The others, they were all over.

Spread.

Yeah.

Yeah. Did you have any contact with your parents? Did you hear from your parents?

Yes. My mother-- where was she? I think by that time, they sent people to Westerbork. My father had been in a-- they called that [? Fendlo ?] in Holland. They were all men, Jewish men. But they could go out, go and come.

But then they created this camp, Westerbork. So they sent my father there, my mother there, and then also my youngest brother and two sisters. They were all sent there.

But meanwhile, you're at The Hague. You're in The Hague.

Yeah.

OK, and then when did you leave there?

In May. So then my sister thought I could stay in Amsterdam, could work. And she had a place for me where to work. But the people didn't get the work permission.

So I was there already, but I had to stop. And then I was in her house, stayed with her. And one day, I got a notice to come to the foreign police. You know, you had to go every two weeks go over to say, well, I'm here.

Like to register or something?

Yeah. And--

Did you have any papers then? Did you have identification papers?

No, I don't think I had anything, no. And I can't clearly remember. I went into town. And I took my-- I went my sister's bicycle. In Holland, everything's done by bike.

Somehow, they told me, or some agent came and says, you have to go-- yeah, now I remember. You have to go to Westerbork. And they took me. And they put me in this big, big house that was like a jail.

And I stayed there for a night. And in the morning, somebody came. They took me out in this big car to the station.

Were you by yourself?

Central Station in Amsterdam. They treated me like a criminal. And we went into the train. And they took me to Westerbork.

[INAUDIBLE]

This is tape one, side two. And you were talking about going to Westerbork. And you said you were-- were you taken by yourself, or were you with other people?

By myself.

And who took you?

With a policeman, I think.

Did you know where you were going?

I think so. Well, my parents were there.

You knew your parents were there?

Oh, yeah.

You did.

I had to visit them once. My sister and I, we went. Yeah.

So you get to Westerbork. And did you get to be with your parents?

Yes. Yes.

And what was the reaction when you-- they realized you were there? They were surprised and happy to see me. And it was OK.

We had freedom there in Holland, in Westerbork. We were assigned to jobs. But each family had a little apartment. And you did your job. And you came home, and you ate together.

What kind of job did you have?

You know, I forgot.

OK, but you went out--

What did we do? I don't know. I forgot.

I know my father, he worked in some-- they had a big building. What they called it? Tailor shop. My mother, I think, worked in the kitchen there.

Was that hard for her? She had never worked before.

No. Couple hours. But--

So you would get up and go--

I forgot. I forgot.

That's all right. It was a long time ago.

Well, what I-- what did I do?

So you got up in the morning.

I'm sure I did something.

Yeah, OK. And you got to Westerbork, was it January '43, do you think?

Was it '43?

OK, and how--

Yeah, it must have been '43, yeah.

And did you know a lot of other people there?

No.

It was just your family.

Mm-hmm.

And were your parents' health good then?

Yeah, yeah. But I made a lot of friends. And we had all gatherings. And--

These are people your age? Other young--

Oh, I know what I did. Now I remember. Yeah, lots of--

A lot of young people.

Yeah, we had all parties. And we came together. And I know--

Young men and women?

Yes, yes. A lot of them got married there even. My sister got married.

Did you have any boyfriends then?

No, I don't think-- yeah, yeah. Somebody that was 20 years older than I am.

Oh, uh-huh.

Well, he left. They took him. I was assigned to a couple barracks. It was about 10 minutes' walk from the camp.

And in these barracks, they-- it wasn't police. They-- what you call them?

Guards?

Guards lived there. And we had to clean these rooms. Couple young girls, every morning, we walked out, and we walked back. Yeah.

Was that hard for you to do?

No, I was young. What, 18, 19 I was. No. And they were all good--

And what about food? Did you have enough food?

Yeah.

How did you get the food?

I forgot. There was a big, big kitchen. I don't know.

And you were warm enough?

Oh, yes.

With blankets?

Yes.

You had enough clothes?

Yeah, my parents had a little apartment-- two bedrooms, and a living room, and a kitchen. I don't know. We went to a dining room and ate. But you could get things and eat at home.

Was this a frightening time--

No.

--those months?

No.

No.

No, not in Holland.

Did you know what was happening in the rest of Europe? Were you aware at that time?



Didn't know anything.

You didn't know.

Didn't know anything.

Uh-huh.

No. We didn't get any newspapers, no radio.

What about-- no radio?

No, nothing like that. No news. No. Very little. We knew there was a war. And the Germans had occupied Holland.

Well, I probably didn't care that much what goes on in the world. Maybe my father, he knew more. But, well, you lived day by day. People came. People left. And--

Did you know where they were--

In the beginning, there was nothing when I came. But then they started twice a week to deport people. And we did not know where--

You did not know where they were going.

No idea. No idea.

Where did you think they were going? You just--

To another place. My sister, I think, when-- she was there with her husband and her three children. And never heard from her again.

Yeah, my-- we got a card from here husband, where is my wife and children? But no idea where he was, what-- he went to Auschwitz, I'm sure.

He went by him-- he was taken away?

No, with the family.

The whole family.

They left--

Together.

Yeah, never-- apparently, what they did, they took the mother, the wife, and the children, and some men. But he didn't come back.

So you stayed at Westerbork, and people were leaving.

Oh, yeah, twice a week.

And when did you realize where they were going to? Or did you ever?

I don't think we ever.

And then new people would come in?

Yes. Yes, by the train loads, they came in. And they built some more barracks. And it was overcrowded at one time. But they shipped them off.

And then how long did you stay at Westerbork?

I think it was-- must've-- well, was that '44 in-- yeah, in January, I went to Theresienstadt from Westerbork.

How did you know you were supposed to leave?

Well, they let us know.

How?

And you know, my-- I don't know anymore. We probably got a notice, or I have no idea. My parents and my younger sister were on the list.

And my brother, my sister, [? Juliene ?], and my-- and me, we went voluntary. Can you imagine that?

Voluntary.

With my parents.

To Theresienstadt.

Yeah. And my brother Leo was working as an electrician with somebody. He was a Gentile. And he liked him very much. And he said, Leo, don't go. Don't go.

And my brother said, I go where my parents go. I don't let them go alone. So the two of us, we went, too.

Can you imagine? We-- they would all be alive today. Voluntary. None of them came back.

How did you get to Theresienstadt?

In the trains, in the cattle--

Theresienstadt cattle car? What was that?

No. I don't-- no, it wasn't cattle car, not to Theresienstadt. They were like ordinary--

Ordinary trains.

Yeah.

And then you--

And I remember, we stopped before Theresienstadt. We didn't know where we were going.

What did you--

It was all day, all night. And you just, you went.

What did you take with you?

Not much. We left everything. Not much at all, clothes, a little.

And on this train station-- [? Boschevitz ?] it was named, was already Poland-- there were American PWs. Isn't that called PWs?

Mm-hmm, Prisoners of War.

Prison of War, Americans. And do you know what? They asked us for food. I never forget these W.

Yeah, and then we came to Theresienstadt, which is a-- I'm sure you know what it is, the old city there, in Czechoslovakia. It wasn't--

And when you first got there, what was your first impression?

Of God, you so bewildered, you didn't know. There were Germans. They took videos, films. And everything looked very nice.

And somebody told me, yeah, that is propaganda. You know what propaganda is? They say, look how good the Jews live. And meanwhile they were killing them a little further.

And, well, we were separated. The women were alone. And the men were alone. So my parents weren't together into [INAUDIBLE]. But you were free.

So you were living with your mother?

Yeah, and my sister. And then my other sister, [? Irma, ?] with her husband. And she had a child in Westerbork. They came with us.

Did you say-- did she give birth to the child in Westerbork?

In Westerbork, yeah. They had many babies. Yeah, they had a hospital and all.

So she gave birth in a hospital in Westerbork?

Yeah.

So she brought this little baby with her.

Oh, a beautiful child, [? Miriam ?].

To Theresienstadt.

Yeah, beautiful.

And did you see your father? Did you see your brothers at all?

In--

Yeah, in Theresienstadt.

Yeah. Yeah. Wait a minute, did she?. Yeah, we meet. We met each other every day. Every night, we were sitting

together, going together.

Did you work at all?

Also, we were assigned-- I was assigned to a group. And we cleaned everywhere-- empty buildings, empty houses. And I remember we had brown overalls on they gave us.

Yeah, and every day, but another place-- in hospital, or in a lumber yard. And it was to keep people busy.

Was it--

But Saturday, Sunday, you did nothing. You did what you want to do.

Was this a particularly frightening time?

No.

No?

Not Theresienstadt, no.

OK.

But, yeah, a lot of things went on. They had a big hospital, and it was normal in there. People that was sick were sent there. They had doctors.

But you couldn't get out. You were--

Confined.

Yeah.

Did you ever have to wear a yellow star?

Sure.

When did you start wearing the star? In Amsterdam?

I think it was-- did we wear it in Holland? No, not in Amsterdam, not then. But later, I did wear it.

And in fact, I had it here. And I lost it. I can't find it.

What was it like for you to have to wear the star?

Was bad, really bad.

What did you feel like when you--

Bad. Real bad. Yeah.

And you sewed it on your clothes?

Yeah.

Why did it feel bad?

What? Well, that one had to do something like that, put Jew here. But you did it. You had to. If not, you-- I mean, when you're under stress, and frightening, and-- you do everything they tell you.

So now you're in Theresienstadt, and you're cleaning.

Yeah, every day. But we didn't do much.

Right. And how long did you stay in Theresienstadt?

I think we left in May. May 23 every year, the 23rd of May, I'm sad. May 23, we left. It was a beautiful day. Everything was in bloom there.

And who did you leave with?

Everybody.

Everybody.

My parents and-- yeah, to Auschwitz.

And how did you get there?

By-- was it-- yeah, it was cattle car. It was cattle car. It was full.

Have you ever seen Doctor Zhivago? Well, that's how it was. And we didn't know where we were going.

The train stopped in front. It's there today. I'm sure you've seen it, the gates. The train stopped.

And a German guy said to me-- he was standing outside-- whoever goes in here will never come out, he told me. I didn't tell anybody. I will never forget it. So--

Was it a long trip from Theresienstadt?

Yeah, I think it was all through the night, to day. It's quite a trip. And I don't think we had anything to eat.

Nothing to eat?

Yeah, it was terrible.

And your parents, how were your parents handling it?

We didn't talk much. I mean, everybody was shocked.

And did you know-- you did not know where you were going.

No, no idea.

And then you arrive. And the doors open. And did you-- your first reaction-- you said this German--

Well, there was nothing. There is nothing but a couple of barracks. We came to a place, well, they kept us outside.

And these Germans, guards or whatever they were, SS, went around. And one said, give me your gold ring. They're

going to take it away from you anyway. I remember, they took my mother's gold ring off, wedding band and everything, watches.

Were you still all together--

Yes.

--with your father.

At that moment, I think.

Still, the men and women were together.

At that moment, yeah.

Was it during the day or at night?

It was night.

Nighttime.

Evening, yeah. And then they put us in barracks. We had a [? wall ?] [INAUDIBLE].

Yeah, my-- I think my father was with us. And my brother, I don't know where he was. I was always looking for him.

But we were in [? that long. ?] And then they-- couple of weeks, we worked there. We made some gun-- for the rifles, some-- what is that called?

You mean something for the inside of the rifle?

Yeah.

Were you wearing your own clothes?

No. I don't think so. I don't know.

What were you wearing?

I don't know what did I wear. Maybe I did. I don't remember. I know in other camps we didn't. I--

But you were still all together. Did you get a number? Were you given a number?

I have it.

In Auschwitz.

Yes.

Yeah.

Yeah. That was when you first--

But I had it taken out here.

That was when you first arrived, they gave you the number?

Yes. Yeah, it was bad. And they examined the women, the girls. It was terrible. We didn't know why, what they wanted from us.

And did they remove your hair--

Yeah.

--in Auschwitz?

Me-- no, not in Auschwitz, in a-- wait a minute. Where was I? Later, later, in another camp they shaved me. [INAUDIBLE] thing it was. I don't know why shaved me.

How long were you in Auschwitz?

I wasn't there that-- too long. I think it was from end of May till beginning of August. I think August 4 we went to Stutthof.

Who went to-- who did you go with?

My sisters two and me.

Your sister?

So my parents, everybody was left behind.

Behind in Auschwitz. So you had to leave with your two sisters?

Had to? We were lucky that we-- they selected for work. And we were chosen.

And otherwise, somebody told me, a Czech, a Jew-- he was from [? Brno. ?] When we came to Auschwitz, I asked him. I said, what goes on here?

What is this? What goes on? There were only chimneys and the barracks.

Well, he told me, he said, look, if you're smart, volunteer for work. Get out of here. If not, that's it. So and I remembered that.

So one day, it was only luck. One day, they-- these big-- you heard of Mengele?

Yes.

These three big Germans, well, they said, whoever wants to go, just go. Go to that barrack. Go. And I think we had to take our clothes off. Yeah, naked.

You heard these stories, no? Well, that happened to me. See, I was always-- I always had to know everything first. I had to be everywhere. I had to know, I had to-- I never stood back, and I always knew.

So I-- so here we are. And my sisters, I said, look, don't let's stay together. If they knew you belong together, they didn't send you, you know? They separated you.

So here, I still see the big guy. I went up to him. This is true. I said to this-- and it was Mengele-- in German, I said, listen, I want to live. Please let me live.

And he said to that other German, he said, look at her. I have to translate this in English. It's hard for me now. I'm upset.

Look at that little one. What a courage she has. He says, OK, go over there. Can you believe me that's how I live? Mengele was that.

But how did you know it was Mengele?

I don't know. I think now I know that was the guy that did all the experiments. Yeah, he said, look at her. I'll never forget it.

And my sisters were also picked. And maybe a day later, my parents were gone. My father, all-- everything was empty, everything, everybody.

My brother, somebody told me, was transported to Mauthausen. Was such a nice boy. 19 years. Such a nice boy. [? Volunteered. ?] Me, too.

So we went to Stutthof. When we arrived, I remember it was a long, long trip. And there was a German soldier. He was a guard. But he was transferred as a punishment to Auschwitz.

And he-- like I said, I always had to know. Had to be-- he said to me, I don't know what goes on, what they're doing. He says, but where you're going, maybe it's better than where you're coming from. And he brought me a basket of strawberries. Can you-- he could have been shot for that.

We stayed there all night in this train. You couldn't even sit.

This was another cattle car?

Yeah, from Auschwitz to Stutthof. And then in the-- yeah, we were transferred into these half things there. It was a open-- to Stutthof.

When we get to Stutthof, do you know that two weeks we stayed outside? We slept two weeks outside in Stutthof. They had no room for us.

They slept out on the ground outside?

Yes, we did. Here, my sister, one lay here. One lay there, under the sky. Two weeks, it didn't rain once, two weeks. Can you imagine?

I don't know where we ate, how we-- anyway, I knew I saw a lot of people going by, and dead ones on wagons. And Stutthof wasn't that bad. And Auschwitz, you know what they did over there.

You-- I once looked into a place. I saw at least 100 bodies laying there. But in Stutthof, I don't think they did it.

When you were in--

They killed my sister in Stutthof, I think both of them.

What, from overwork or from--

My younger sister, [? Adit ?], was-- how old was she? 15, 16? Young girl.

I don't know. She got sick. And I used to wrap her in paper. And malnutrition, nothing to eat.



And one day they came, and they took her. And I said to this-- was a woman in uniform, let me go with her. You know what she did? She hit me in the face.

She said, go back. She knew. They killed her. She knew what would happen. I had no idea.

Then the other one, what was with her? She was pregnant. She was pregnant.

And they took her. And I also never heard from [INAUDIBLE]. No, that was a little later. No, in Stutthof we were all together for a couple weeks.

And then one day they came, and they took us to a work camp. And there were three barracks only, all in one, the beds. And every morning, we had to go out.

We made streets and the airport they were building, near the Gdansk. You know where Danzig is? They were building an airport. And that was already, it was that, the fall. And war was already over in some places, wasn't it? This was--

Fall of '44 we're talking about.

Yeah, yeah. And so every day, we marched out. And we-- oh, it was just awful.

But we didn't-- yeah, we did a little here, a little there, moved some bricks, then do this, do that. This went on for-- for what? Then we stayed all whole day.

And then they were so nasty. On Sundays, we didn't work. They let us stay outside all day.

And also, I don't know what it is. It must be-- what is that called? Destiny. On days there where we worked, it was called Praust. Away from Stutthof was called Praust.

And every day, the Germans came with a truck. I don't know what they did. And there was one-- and some of them, they didn't know what we were. Or what are you doing?

Are you Jews? What are you? They had no idea, you know? This is true.

And here comes this man. I think he was-- he was with the military. And he wore a blue uniform.

And he said to me-- and he asked me where I was from. I said, from the Borken in Westphalia. Oh. And I spoke German with him. Most of them were from Poland, from Czechoslovakia.

And he said to me, listen, if you want to, I take you away from here. He says, you speak German. And I give you [INAUDIBLE].

We had, at that time, special clothes, a linen dress, just a little-- no stockings, no underwear, nothing. He says, come home with me. I said-- he says, we make arrangement.

And I told him, I can't. I have my two sisters here. But I was stupid. I should've taken him-- but you couldn't really move. There was-- there were guards all over, you see?

But he said, come on. I take you away. He says, I have no idea what goes on. What are you? Isn't that something?

Not everyone [INAUDIBLE]. But they liked it, the Germans. They liked-- they didn't do anything against-- maybe out of fear. But most of them liked it. And now, nobody knows anything.

So you had moved from Stutthof to this next place, you said.

Yeah, from Stutthof--

To near Gdansk.

Yeah, Praust.

Praust.

And--

And you were working there?

Yeah. And one day, they came. And they said, whoever can walk, walk out. We're leaving. We're going. Take your blanket, and we're going. And--