

This is an interview for the Holocaust Memorial Museum with Jaffa Munk, conducted by Margaret Garrett on October 8, 1996, in Baltimore, Maryland, tape 2, side A.

You were talking about the last words that your father spoke to you at the entrance to Auschwitz.

Yes. Then we were walking, and there was a huge, tall, beautiful man in army uniforms. He had white gloves on his hand, shiny boots, and a silver stick in his hand. When our turn came to approach him, he pointed my mother to the left, my and my sister, and the two others sisters, [? Solomon, ?] from our hometown, to the right.

When I noticed that my mother was pointed to the left I grabbed her skirt and I wanted to pull her. My mother, who spoke beautiful German, she said to him, please mister, I am capable of working. I am a young woman. May I go to the other side? How she knew that left means not to go to good side, I can't tell. Most probably, she saw that more young people are put to the right. Or she just wanted to be with her children.

But I remember her words that she said, I am capable of working. And he became so angry that with his beautiful shiny boots he beat into my mother and he threw her to the left. I still was holding her skirt and trying to pull, but he pushed her so hard that that was the last time I saw my mother. As I know, my mother was gassed that very same day in Auschwitz.

We were taken to a big huge place where there were "beauticians," quote unquote, waiting for us. They shaved our hair off completely. They said that we have to take off our clothing. We had been traveling for a long time. We have to have some shower. And that we just should pile up nicely our clothing. We were taken into a shower. And when we came back, no more clothing was waiting.

We then naked, we had to stand and German soldiers came to count us-- naked without hair. I remember screaming, Esther, Esther. That's the name-- Judith Esther-- my sister. And she said, I am standing next to you. I couldn't recognize her without hair, without clothing. And after they counted us, then they threw us, each one, some kind of an old shoe and an old dress.

Then when we were about dressed, we had to march again, five in a row. And there was a painting lady who had a red can of red paint, and she painted in the back of our dress. I remember that I felt that the paint goes into my body. Why are they painting our dress? Well, in case we might in some miraculous way try to escape from Auschwitz. We can't because we will be noticed from far away that we are inmates of Auschwitz.

From the bathing house we were marched into Birkenau, which was the camp for the womans. Yeah, that's a sub-camp of Auschwitz-- Auschwitz-Birkenau. And we were given to go into a huge bunk. It was about the length of 2 times, 3 times, of my living room, where we had been pushed in, 1,000 girls. And no beds, no blankets, nothing was in that room.

They again called us to stand for Zählappell, which is roll call. And I happened to want to make, you know. And I asked the head of the camp, where can I go. And she said, in the back, but do it fast. So until I find it, and until I made it, and I came back, and they were already-- the Germans-- they were coming again to count us.

She became very angry and she gave me-- she beat me up in my face, that I could not see for days. I got so swollen in my face, because she was blamed that there is missing one person from the counting. Then I was standing in the row and they counted again and everything was OK.

We were given food. And the food consisted of black coffee and a little piece of bread, the size of half of my palm. We ate and we asked, where are we going to sleep. So the head of the bunk said to us, what do you think, you are in Budapest? What do you mean, "beds." You go and lay down on the bare floor.

And she threw, for every two girl, a blanket. And she said, that is it. That's for covering and whatever you want to do with it. We were so exhausted from the trip, from their separation, from the shaving our hair, from starvation, that we all

fell asleep with the blanket, two to one blanket.

The next day, they took us to a different bunk. And that bunk had some kind of bridge beds. You know, like how you call children have those kind of--

Like bunk beds?

Bunk beds, that's right. So we were taken there. And again, counting-- and this counting business meant sometimes three or four times in a day, sometimes we had to be standing outside early in the morning. And in Auschwitz, even though it was June when we arrived, the nights were very cold. And sometimes we were standing for four hours, until the Germans they arrived and they counted us, with the dogs surrounding us, jumping.

If they saw somebody look to them too pale or too skinny, they would call out. At that time, we didn't understand where they are taking them. And each day, we were less and less. This was a camp that is called Vernichtungslager, which word means that an elimination camp. Nobody was working. Nobody was doing nothing. Every day less and less people remained in the camp.

Opposite of our bunk was a so-called hospital. And if somebody was sick and did go to that hospital, never returned back from there. My best friend from my childhood, her name [? Anniko ?] Weiss, who came down with scarlet fever after a few days we were in Auschwitz. We tried to hide her. We tried to hold her. We tried to massage her. We tried to give up our little bit of warm stew that we were given, just to make sure that she should not go to the hospital. But nothing helped.

One day she collapsed from the high fever and she went over to the hospital. But luckily, there was one German nurse who had pity on her. She was a very beautiful 13-year-old, cheerful little girl whose mother happened to be with us. And she told her, you are enough good, go back. Don't stay here in the hospital.

We used to see trucks coming. And they would pile on the truck sick people. Well, they used to ask, where are they taking them? The answer used to be that they are taking them to the hospital. But they never came back. So we understood that it couldn't be the hospital.

After we have been maybe two or three weeks in the concentration camp-- Lager B3, Birkenau-- they announced that all those children who are under the age of 16, from age whatever, remained alive, they should be lining up. They will be united with their parents. They will be given better food. They are going to have milk and cake and bread.

Who didn't want that-- to be united with their parents? We did not know yet, you know, that nobody from our parents is any more alive. Or even, if it's alive, we will not be united with them. We lined up happily. We going to a better place.

Now, was Esther under 16 also?

Yes. Esther is two years older than I am. So we lined up. And the two other sisters-- the [? Solomon ?] sisters, who were members of my father's congregation-- they said, oh, you're going away, you know, we will remain here. Because they were older. One of them was already married. And the other one was 22, 23 years old. And they said, oh, we will miss you so much. Why are you going? But we said, you know, we will be united with the family and we are going to be served better food. So we lined up.

Here we are lining up, 5 again in the row. They're again counting us. Around us all the time, SS soldiers with huge, big dogs that, God forbidden, we can't move now any more from the row. As we are standing and they are counting, I hear a voice saying go back, don't go with this group. And I was looking, who is talking to me? I believe that the German lady soldier, she would be saying this to me. Why is she saying this to me?

Now, until this day, I don't know if she was the one who was talking or it was an inner voice, instinct, or the soul of my mother. The end of the story is that I grabbed my sister. And she was very annoyed-- why, we should be going, we will have good. And when I heard this voice three times, saying to me, just get out from this, I took her. And the German

soldier, the lady, with her dog, did not interfere. She let us go out from the row. And we walked back to our bunk. And the whole group was taken. Not to be united with their parents in this world, but to the gas chamber.

And many times, you know, until this day, sometimes I feel guilty. Why I have been the one who was told, if it was by this German soldier or by the soul of my mother or an angel or whatever, you know, why the other girls had to go to their death? But that's fate, you know. And perhaps God had a special reason to save us from that time, from the death.

So a lot of miracle things happened in Auschwitz. After a while, we were taken over in the same camp to a different headquarters. And one night, I will never forget it, we heard tremendous screaming. And there were no windows. Only through the cracks of the wooden bunk we could be looking out. And we saw a lot of fires and a lot of smoke going. All the Gypsies who had been also taken to Auschwitz have been gassed that night.

And the Gypsies were very defiant in that matter. The Jewish people, when they were taken to the gas chambers, they were singing Shema Yisrael. They were saying their prayer. The Gypsy people have no religion, you know. They are very primitive people. They were trying to fight. They were trying to take their nails and attack the soldiers.

It was such a night that it's still ringing in my ear-- the screaming of the Gypsy people who were gassed that night. And then the fire that we saw was their body was burned to ashes. That was the very first time that we really saw with all our own eyes that there is a gas chamber and that there is fire. And from that day on, we knew that if you are taken from this camp you are taken to the gas chamber and you are being burned. So we were very much aware what is going on in Auschwitz

In about end of August, beginning of September-- because the dates are not so clear, you know-- except that through some miraculous way, we were aware that when is our holiday coming. There was always one girl, or one-- [INAUDIBLE] marching, they used to take us to the bath, to the collective bath.

We would march near to the men's camp. They always used to scream names. Maybe that is my relative. Did you see this? Did you see that, you know? They also would scream to us, do you know that tomorrow is Shabbat? Or do you know that tomorrow is the New Year?

One day we were marching, and one of my uncle was screaming. And he was asking if we saw his wife, Olga. So we knew that he is still alive. The mens were mainly in Auschwitz. And they have been a little bit working. What their work was exactly, it's hard for me to know. What?

Do you want to stop and rest your voice?

Just for a minute.

OK.

In about beginning of September, they called again that they need some workers for a factory. But the entire camp has to line up in a very empty field. And they are going to choose some people for work. I had no choice, because this time not age, not group, or not one part of the camp, but the entire camp, had to be naked, stand.

And the German soldiers, and the head of them, Dr. Mengele, that we called him The Angel of Death, he came. And he started to count. And after he was counting the entire camp-- that was a few thousand girls-- he started to point to the right, again, and to the left.

How did you know that it was Dr. Mengele?

We know it because when we arrived the striped soldiers-- the striped inmates-- they told us that there is a doctor whose name is Dr. Mengele. And then later on, the head of the camp, who happened to be a Jewish girl who was working for the Germans, she used to throw this, oh wait till you meet Dr. Mengele. So we knew it, that that was Dr. Josef Mengele.

And he came. And he started to point people. But this time the left meant that you remained still in Auschwitz. And right is the group that is going to leave the camp and is going to be taken to some kind of a factory to work. They said that the soldiers are very busy on the front, you know. They are fighting the war. And there are no more able people working in the factories.

So my sister has been chosen to go to the work, and I to remain in the camp. I didn't want to get separated from my sister. And somehow I felt that if I remain alone here, I won't be able to endure anymore. Being together gave strength, each one of us strengthening the other, you know. We were, at least, giving each of us faith and strength to continue.

So what should I do? I started to crawl on my stomach towards the group that has been chosen. And one of the SS soldiers noticed me and beat with his bayonet on my back, which there is still a mark of it. And he said, in German, [GERMAN]. You devil Jew, you will anyway die. Go where you want to go.

And I crawled into that group. And then, again, they started to count and count and count, you know. And somehow I was very lucky that, even though that they counted again and again, that there has to be only 300 in the group. How it happened, it was 300 with me together. Now if somebody left because her sister was-- I can't tell you.

And at that time they took us to a train and we left Auschwitz. They planned to then take us, really, to a factory, but the Allies were, by that time, bombing. American and British soldiers were already heavily fighting. And I remember that the train was going back and forth and back and forth. They couldn't really go-- advance-- because each time when the bombing was, they would ship the train backwards to Auschwitz.

So we didn't know, is this a new method of killing us? Because in the train we, again, didn't have air. We didn't have food. And we thought that we are going to die. And no one will ever know what happened to us because we are in the train. However, after three or four days of being shifting back and back and forth, we arrived to a camp in Bergen-Belsen.

And when we arrived to Bergen-Belsen, it was exactly a day before our most holy day of the year, Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is the atonement of the Jewish people. And we made that decision that we are going to fast.

You and Esther decided.

That's right, and a few other friends who were with us in the camp. And the German people there in Bergen-Belsen, they didn't do really nothing with us-- no working, not so much roll calls, you know. But in Bergen-Belsen the other problem existed that a lot of people came down with typhoid fever, dysentery. The food was tiny bit maybe even better than in Auschwitz.

That day we requested that we want to fast. Would they give us two portions? They said, what, are you crazy? What you think where you are? You are back in Hungary? However, we fasted. And we were in Bergen-Belsen sleeping on the bare floor, a little bit of straw, somehow, we collected.

And I remember that I came down with the infection of my gums. My whole face was swollen from it. Yet I would not dare to go to the infirmary because, by that time, we had enough knowledge that if you do go to the infirmary, that's the end of you.

Back to Yom Kippur. So you and Esther and some friends fasted. And did you observe in any other way than the fasting?

No, we couldn't. Except that a few prayers that we remembered. Some older girls who remembered a little part of the prayer, we would be singing together or saying together.

This was on Yom Kippur.

On Yom Kippur. And we remained in Bergen-Belsen for a couple weeks. And then, at last, we were taken to another

camp called Rochlitz, where there was really a factory. And it amazes me until this day that-- not only that they took us to work, but they were teaching us certain technical measurements. We were schooled.

They were hoping-- the Germans-- that the war will take such a long time, or that they will be enslaving us for such a duration of time, or just, this is the way of the Germans, to educate all the time. It was amazing. Every evening we were taken to a school for two weeks. And we were learning special kind of measurements of aeroplane little appliances. The factory where we have been working was doing all kind of little tools and gadgets for aeroplanes.

In that factory, we worked three shifts. Each time, eight hours-- sometimes in the night, sometimes in the day, sometimes in the evening. And the foreman, who happened to be a German fellow, was having such a pity on me. And I am, until this day, very thankful, in a way, for him. And he used to call me in, into his office, and close the door and gave me a little bit of his farina. He was always eating cooked farina in the morning. So I always looked forward to the shift when I worked in the morning because that day I know that I am going to have something in my stomach.

One day, while I was in his office eating the farina, the German soldiers who came once in a while to observe if we are working, if we are producing, if we are doing our job [INAUDIBLE]. And she sees me inside. He quickly grabbed the plate and threw it down. And he's started to scream at me, so tomorrow you'll know better how to measure the alliance that you have to do. I understood that that was a cover-up. He himself could be in trouble favoring or doing anything for me.

While we were in that camp, it came our holiday, Hanukkah, the holiday of lighting the menorah. And we wanted so much to light because they were so broken by then-- spiritually, mentally, emotionally, physically. We thought maybe that would cheer us up. Maybe that would give us some kind of a hope, thinking how the war between the Greeks and the Jewish people many years ago took place. Maybe that light would bring in some kind of warm. But where do we have-- where do we have a menorah? Where do we have oil? What can we do?

So there were girls who were working in the kitchen, that was cooking for us that little bit of food. And one of the girls said, you know what, girls, let's not talk about it. I'm going to bring home some potato. We will cut the potato and carve it, and make from it like a menorah. Lo and behold, every evening she put one potato, until she had four potatoes. Cut it in half, we scooped it out. I don't know how we did it, but we did it.

And now is the problem where we could get some kind of an oil to light the menorah. So the other girl, who was working, she said, just don't talk about it. I'm going to find something. And she find a old bottle. She filled it in a little bit of oil that was used for the cooking. So now we have potato and oil but we don't have the wax. What we are going to do?

So we tore from our one dress that we had. We had no underwear. We tore and we made wicks, you know. And put it in the oil, dipped it in. We have no matches. And was one soldier who, every evening, used to come and just go by the little houses. At that time, we were put up four to a little house. This was a camp that was taken away, working, for a summer camp or some sort of thing. It had small, tiny, little houses and four girls to each little house.

And the soldier used to come to see if it's quiet, if everybody is doing what they supposed to do. And I went out and I said to the soldier, you know what, I need desperately just one match, if you would give me. He says, for what. I said, well, don't ask too many questions. Could you give me one match? And he threw his match.

We lit the Hanukkah candle the next evening. And we were all crying. And the whole camp came to that one house. And they said, how did you got this? How did you made it? And we remembered one Hanukkah song. And we were singing the Hanukkah song. And that gave us strength. We are human. We celebrating a holiday. We are not completely oppressed.

And the soldiers who came to check this evening was a different one. He was himself, that a few came and started to knock on the door. What are you doing? What do you think where you are? You are inmates. This is an N-O. You can't do it. You can't have Hanukkah candle. They didn't say Hanukkah candle. They said, you know, you can't have fire in your house-- out, out. And we had to kneel on our knee for four hours as punishment that we dared.

But we were all smiling to each other. Never mind this kneeling. But we did. We shout to the Germans that we are still human beings and what they are aiming to completely destroy in us-- our emotions, our spirit-- they did not succeed at.

Many times, you know, when I am asked, how did you revolt, why didn't you revolt-- our main revolt was showing that we are human. Physically, we couldn't. We were surrounded with barbed wires, with electric wires. We could never escape. But we always tried to remain human, to help each other, to try to celebrate here and there a certain holiday. This way we revolted. We show to them that as much you would like to destroy us, you can't completely destroy our spirit.

So your religion really helped you to keep going.

A lot.

Let's stop here.

Tape 2, side B. You were talking about how important religion had been as helping you to survive.

All the time that we have been in the camp, religion gave us a lot of strength. And the devotion to keep religion, and the devotion to each other, the helpfulness of one to another, gave strength. And that ever we could observe any of the customs or holidays, I think that spiritually, mentally, and emotionally gave us always uplift and strength.

I remember in Bergen-Belsen, there was a girl with us who remained from the Holocaust, lives in Israel, in Jerusalem, who would collect in a old broken can some rain water, in order that she can wash her hand to that little ration, tiny bit of bread, and bless over it, so she can thank God for sustaining her life and giving her food.

I remember celebrating in Auschwitz the day that we called Tisha B'Av. And we are remembering the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, we fasted. And being able to do all these things gave us a lot of emotional strength as well as spiritual strength. I would say that most of the people who had faith, who had religion, who tried to say a certain prayers that they remember, or, here and there, smuggled people in a prayer book. And we were, at least once in a week, saying some kind of a prayer.

They were the ones who could take the suffering. And they are the ones who were able to overcome a lot of the hardship. I would say that people who had no faith, and mainly people who came from very spoiled backgrounds, very well-to-do people who never knew any kind of hardship, they were the first one, at least from my own experience. The ones who came from Miskolc or from Onã³d. If I look and I see who remained from the Holocaust, definitely from my hometown, all the girls who came from very well-to-do families, no one of them came back.

And even though that I come from a middle class family, and we had a maid, my mother always made sure that we have some kind of job, such as making beds, washing the dishes. And we always used to ask her, but why not Mariska, our maid? Why do we have to do? Mother said, you never know when you will need it.

And I am very thankful for her having this foresight. If it was for Auschwitz or for my life later on, you know. I think that it was very beneficial and very special. And I thankful my parents, that they raised me to have faith in God, you know. And whenever anything very bad happened, I know always to whom to turn. It was my God.

And now I am going to go back to the camp where I have been working in that factory, and where we celebrated Hanukkah. And around middle of January, one day we were just roaming around in the camp. The group that was in the factory was in the factory. That girls were working in the kitchen. And the group that was off, we were just roaming outside, trying to breathe a little fresh air.

Suddenly from far away, we see a column of mens marching. And they were very, very tired, very weak. Some of them in striped clothing. And they were screaming, the war is over. We they thought that they crazy. Why is the war over if we are still in a camp and they are marching? But they probably had some kind of knowledge that the Allies are

advancing. They passed by. We didn't know nothing what their fate was. We continued to work.

However, about two or three weeks later, we were told that we have to empty this camp. And we are going to be taken to a new concentration camp. We were taken to a new concentration camp called Graslitz. Graslitz was actually not a camp. It was a jailhouse. We were put up, how they emptied, or it was an old jailhouse. I do not know. But we were 1,800 girls put up in a jailhouse.

They had bunk beds. We were given very meager food there, only twice in the day. The German soldiers kept on saying, we don't have any more food, either, so we can't provide for you. Every morning, they would march us few kilometer away from the jailhouse, under the supervision the guard of the SS soldiers, to a huge mountain.

We had to chain line from the top of the mountain to the bottom of the mountain. On the top of the mountain was a huge pile of stones. We had to take those stones down. But how? One was throwing it to the other person. And if you dropped it, you were beaten up. Well, we thought, at least we are instrumental. We are going to have to build something. That's why we are taking the stones down.

But the next day came our surprise. We have to pile the stones and take from the bottom up to the top of the mountain. And this went on for couple of weeks. It was just to destroy us. Because even if you are enslaved and you work, and you see that something is growing from it, that something is built from it, you have a certain kind of meaning, satisfaction, you feel that you are instrumental. But just to work to make fun of us, to belittle us, to make a mockery of us, was very bad for our morale.

And some of the girls, they just said, I wish I collapse already. Who wants to live anymore? There is no end to this. We are not going to make it. We have no family anymore. We have been in that camp and doing this work. About middle of March, end of March, one day the SS group of soldiers comes in. And they said, stand up next to your bed. We have to have a serious talk.

We thought that they are going to shoot us. What do they want? Or why they don't take us to work anymore? They said, well, we have to tell you, you have a choice. Either you stay in this jailhouse, but we leaving the building, and we do not provide you with any food and not with guarding you, anything. What will happen to you will happen to you. Or you line up, five in a column, and you march with us. We have to leave this place.

We didn't understand why they have to leave the place and why they are offering for us that we can stay. No one of us dared to remain because we thought, who is going to provide us food. They might lock the door. We won't be able ever to go out. The windows had iron bars. The door had iron bars. If they close us, we will suffocate there.

So everybody marched out, 1,800 girls. And they were marching with us, which one is called the Death March, for six weeks. Marching every single day, sometimes 40 kilometers, sometimes 35 kilometer. And we were sometimes sleeping outside on the bare ground. Sometimes, I remember, this was SÄ°ddeutschland, where it's cold still in March and in April, fairly heavy. Sometimes on the top of the snow we went to sleep. We were licking the snow because we were not given any kind of drink. No food. We were collecting some of the grass, eating.

Once in a while, they would take us to a big barn where we were given some straw. The animals in one side and we on the other. And I don't have to describe to you what smells we had there. And we went to sleep. We collapsed-- hungry, wet sometimes from rain or snow, without food. In the morning, many times I wanted to get up when they called us to line up. And I couldn't move, people laying on me. I would call, please, would you get up. Would you move? We have to line up. They don't move. They are dead.

Each day, less and less of us remained. My sister, who was older-- two years-- than I am, she just asked me, please leave me here. I don't want to go anymore. Her leg was all swollen. She lost her shoe. She had swollen legs. She had pus in her leg. She couldn't move anymore. I used to grab her. I, the young one, the skinny one, but very determined. My personality, I am very active until this day.

I used to put her on my shoulder and a little bit carry her. And then I would say to her, I can't carry you more, but you

have to go, because we will go back and we will tell the story, and we will remain in life. And God is with us. And, again, going and going and going. And this repeated every single day.

If we were lucky, once in a while, they would be able to ask the farmer, the German soldiers, if they have some leftover potato that they cooked for the pigs. And we would be jumping on it. And that would be a feast for us. Many times we were given some flour. And we would just lick the flour.

Once, I remember we were going marching, and by the roads in Germany, in SÃdeutschland, there are ditch next to the road. And we would find some rotten apple. We would pick up and we would be just eating. Sometimes if the Germans, they noticed that you went off from the road even for that one single minute to grasp-- grab-- an apple, they would shoot the person. If some people couldn't walk anymore, they couldn't march, they would be shooting the people.

One evening we arrived to a farm, and before we were even given an opportunity to go to sleep in the barn, one of those German soldiers-- and the rest, somehow, they were not there. One of the soldiers-- a very handsome young fellow-- he starts to talk to us. Before, they wouldn't talk. We were like dogs in their eyes. Even to the dog they were talking better than to us. But this time, he comes over and he says, I have to tell you a big secret. I am actually Jew. My mother was a Jewish person. My father was a German. And I enlisted to the SS in order that I can help you.

We were shocked, you know. You help us? You used to beat us up. You used to shoot the girls who were standing, who could not move anymore. And now you are telling us that you-- what is the reason that you want so much to find favor in our eyes? But we could not think any more clearly. And he said, but I am going to get for you tonight also food. And I am good, right? I am good to you.

So we were not responding to it. We just wait, and if he really is going to give us food. At that moment, the only thing that we wanted was to drink something, to eat something, and be able to go to sleep a little bit. So, lo and behold, he brought us, again, some kind of cooked potato that was half rotten, that was cooked always. Those days, that's what they fed, usually, the pigs. We ate and we went to sleep.

The next day, we were marching. And in the morning, we left that barn and we went by a bridge. There was a little river there. And we looked how beautiful that water, and how lovely it would be just to go down and to wash our face. We are full with lice. Our clothing is full with lice. We are dirty. We haven't been drinking. We haven't been washing our self for weeks already. Could we go down just?

No, the German soldiers are surrounding us with their huge dogs. And they are keeping us, telling us go fast, you know, you have to march. We have to get to a place. We are marching. And then two of us, that evening, we see that we are back in that very same place. And this went on a few days that they surrounded us in that very small spot, maybe two, three little towns. But each time, we are back to the same spot. So we started to think it must be something going on that they can't take us further away.

But still we didn't believe that the end of the war is coming. That time, I think we were already left maybe 400 girls. The rest either collapsed, died during the night in the barns, or were shot by the Germans.

Esther was still with you?

Esther was all the time, and the two sisters. That what I think, you know, gave a lot of strength to each other, that we remained all the time, from day one till the end of the war, together. As we are walking, and each one of us fears that any minute we are going to collapse. And what will be the collapse? We will be shot or we will expire anyway, from no food, no strength, nothing.

One of the [? Solomon ?] sisters-- the older one, [? Mende-- ?] she said, I am going to sit down in the ditch. If they kill me, they kill me. I have been married already. I tasted life already. But if they don't shoot, then you all come and join me later. So she sits down in the ditch. And no German soldier is coming back or shooting or counting or seeing who is here. And we don't see the German soldiers. They went ahead of the column.

So we went back. And we sat down with her. And we sitting, all four of us, in the ditch next to the road. We hear some shooting and we got very scared. We thought, oh, this is a trick. They just left us to sit, but they will return back and they are going to kill us. So we look around. Where can we go? Who will take us? There are no houses. Opposite of the road we see a little forest. We said, let's go into the forest and hide there. We go over the road. We go into the forest. And we are hiding in the forest. This is late afternoon, May the 7th, 1945.

We are sitting there and we are starved. What will happen to us if we are not going to have any food? That will be our end. But the first thing, we look at in the forest. Maybe we find something-- a grass, a apple, a garbage. Nothing we find. We shake out our blanket, which one was full with lice. And let's sit down, because if we are going to stand or walk around, we wasting the little strength we have.

We sitting down and then we hear some kind of little noise. So we walk around and we see a little creek. We went, we drank from that water. We washed our face. We started to say a little prayer, but we remembered by heart. We sat down and we started to cry. What will be our fate? What will happen to us? As we are sitting and we are quiet, holding each other hand, suddenly we hear a rooster. And then a mooing of a cow.

So my sister said, listen, girls, we must be close to a farm. If we hear so vividly, so clearly, a rooster, we must be close to a house. I am going to go there. Suddenly, she's strong. Suddenly, she's willing. Suddenly, she's able. Suddenly, she wants to do. I'm going to beg for food.

So we said, are you crazy. They German. They are also going to shoot you. She said, I am not going to tell. I'm going to tell that I am-- we spoke very well, German-- I'm going to tell that I am a refugee. My house has been bombed. My parents died. I happened to be outside. I remained in life. I have nobody. I am an orphan. Would you give me some food?

So one of the [? Solomon ?] sisters said, I don't let you to go alone. I go with you. But how we will find back the way to the forest? So like in the story of Hansel and Gretel, we tore from our dress, tied to a few bushes. And we were in the beginning of the forest. We were not going in deep, you know. And they walked according to the noise of the cow. And they got-- it was not far, really. It was at the edge of the forest, a little farm. And they went and they begged, and they got some mashed potato. And in a little jar, a little bit of milk.

They came back. We had a feast. We sat down and we ate. And then we made the decision that we can't sleep all in one time, because just in case we hear that the Germans are coming back, we have to go more deep. Maybe we have to hide, whatever. Two, each time, were sleeping. Two were sitting and waiting. We rotated.

It was early in the morning, about 4:30, 5 o'clock in the morning. It was still dark outside. Suddenly we hear a tremendous noise between the trees. We held each one the hand and said our little prayer, God, please, just now, keep us still. And suddenly we thought, this is our end, Maybe a beast, maybe a lion-- who knows what is in the back of the forest and he smelled human being. And he's coming. And if we were not killed by the Germans, we will be killed by a beast.

But lo and behold, suddenly, a huge, tall soldier is standing in the front of us, who screams to us in Jewish language, and says, children, don't be scared. I am your brother. You are liberated. That was May 8. In the morning, the Russians captured that part of Germany. And they knew that there was a group of inmates who were marching. And they were looking for girls where they are.

And he was searching in the gardens and in the roads and in the forest and in the woods and wherever to get. And he says, get up, don't stay here. You go into the town. It's very close by, a town. And any house that you want, you go in and you say that the Russian occupying army told you to be put up.

We had no strength to walk. We walked a little bit. The second house we saw, we opened a gate, and a priest comes out and greets us. Hello, who are you? We told him that we are inmates. That we are inmates, and the three are going to be here by you, because that's what the Russian army told us. And he said, OK. So he points to the barn, that we should be going there. And we didn't wanted to go into the barn, so we went into the yard. And we sat down in the grass. And he

had--

[INAUDIBLE].

I'll shut it off.

So the woman who was his cook, she brought out, again, mashed potato, and this time warm milk, you know. And we eat and be very happy. And we are sitting in the fresh air.

What was the name of the village?

The village was [PLACE NAME]. And we are sitting outside and very happy. Later on we went to sleep in the barn. It was a clean barn. It had hay. It didn't smell because, apparently, he didn't have any more cow there. And we slept.

In the morning, we getting up and we sit outside. We wanted just to be in fresh air. She brought us some bread with a little bit of butter on it, and again some kind of milk. And if I recall, I think she made us some cooked farina. About 9, 10 o'clock in the morning, the same Russian soldier who came into the forest comes to check on us. So girls, how are you doing? We said, fine. How was your sleep? OK. Where did you sleep? So we show him the barn.

He rushed into the house and he said to the priest, excuse me, you have such a huge house, and you put these girls who went to a whole year of troubles, and you're putting them in a barn to sleep? How about you sleep tonight in the barn and these girls inside. So he gave us a room. He slept also, you know, there, in other room. He really had a big house.

And from that day on, he became a whole different person. He realized that this is what his mission is now, to help the refugees to come to certain kind of health, strength. And he gave us beds. She made us beautiful pillow and covers-- you know, with feather. In those days, the pillows were-- I just couldn't sleep in the bed. So I had to go down on the floor and sleep because I was just not used anymore, after a whole year. It was too soft. I just couldn't find myself.

For a few days, until I got used to it, first the pillow, and slowly I got back and I slept in the bed. About three days later, unfortunately, my sister came down with a very high fever, and the two other sisters. And all three had to be put in Libschitz, which one is a nearby city. And they have been put up in a hospital. They all came down with typhoid fever.

And I started to gain weight. And my hair started to grow. And I started to look human. And this priest was very kind. Every day, he wanted to learn to me. He was learning with me Hebrew. He said, how about you become my daughter, you become Catholic. I will provide you with everything. I told him, I really appreciate everything but I am a daughter of a rabbi. And I promised my parents that whatever will happen, I will remain faithful to my own faith. And from that day on, he never bothered me. He was very kind to me.

And then, there were Czechoslovakian soldiers in the town who had a special headquarter. And you could go to their headquarter if you were a refugee, if you were an inmate from a camp. And they would give you a little bit of clothing. And they would direct you a little bit. And I told them that only one thing that I am requesting is if I could get a bicycle so I can go into the other city where my sister and my friends are in the hospital so I can go and visit them.

Lo and behold, they gave me-- how they got for me the bicycle, I really don't know. They gave me a bicycle. They gave me a scarf that, until this day, I think I never got such a scarf in my life. I started to put around my head, you know, around my neck. The humanity started to come back. The woman in me, you know, to look decent, to look human. And the lady who was the cook of the priest, she would bake with me cookies that I should take to the hospital.

And I was, at first, shaking. How can I ride the bike? I haven't been riding a bike for over a year. How can I do that, you know? But God was good to me, and I started first around in the yard. And then I went. And lo and behold, I was on the road, on the bike, going every day to visit the sick.

Until one day I felt this is quite dangerous on the road. There were still Russian army coming in and they are not the nicest. Except this one fellow who liberated us, the rest were not so nice. There is a lot [? more ?] to talk about it, you

know. And I just felt very bad.

And, also, my sister was very, very sick. She-- her mind wasn't any more there. So I begged the head doctor if he could give me some job in the hospital so I can be near to my sister. I told him, otherwise she will die.

We're getting near the end of the tape, so better stop here.