

This is an interview for the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. We are interviewing Frances Hirshfeld. My name is Esther Finder. Today's date is September 30, 1996. This is tape one, side A. Can you please tell me your name?

Frances Hirshfeld.

Was this your name at birth?

Not exactly, because I was born in Poland. And my name at birth was Frieda Miriam Rosenbloom. I wasn't married. Now I told you my married name when you asked me.

When were you born?

July 26, 1918.

And where were you born?

In Opatów Kielecki, Poland.

Is that where you grew up?

Only five years. When I was five years old, I was moved to my aunt and uncle, who raised me. My mother's sister raised me because my father died three months before I was born. And my aunt tried to help my mother because I had an older sister. And my mother was a widow and had no way of supporting herself. She was living with my grandparents. And I was raised in my aunt's house in another town, Zawiercie.

Can you tell me a little bit about that town where you grew up?

Yes. It was a little larger town than the one I was born in, perhaps about 35,000 people. The Jewish population, perhaps 5,000 or 8,000. I'm not sure. I went to grammar school and I went to gymnasium. And unfortunately, when I was 21, I had just begun to plan a career of working, the war broke out. And that is exactly in September 1945, which I'll never forget the voice of the president saying, in the name of God, we're going to war because Hitler invaded Poland.

Let me stay with you for your childhood a little bit longer.

Yeah, I know that's my problem.

Can you tell me about the kinds of things that you studied in school?

First of all, you had to study reading and writing and arithmetic. And then when I went to gymnasium, I studied literature, history, mathematics. All the same things that children when they are in high school I studied. I wasn't very good in geography, I remember that. But I'm ashamed of it because right now I like geography.

I had a lot of friends. We did what usually the teenagers do. I had a very happy home. I was very fortunate in that respect because my people who raised me were very good to me. I saw my mother quite often. In fact, in the beginning, my mother stayed with me for a full year until I got used to the new surroundings. I was only five. Till I was six, she went back to be with my sister in my grandparents' house. But I used to go visiting her for holidays, and my mother used to come and visit us. And life was a happy life.

I have several questions, and I'll ask them one at a time. Was your family observant?

Very, yes. We were not Hasidic, but we were observant. I would call it conservative. Yes. We kept a kosher house. We had to have a cook that was Jewish. We had a cleaning woman that didn't have to be Jewish, but the cook had to be Jewish because she had to know how to keep a kosher house-- a kosher kitchen.

Were your friends predominantly Jewish?

Mostly, yes. I had some non-Jewish friends, but mostly yes.

Did you have any religious instruction?

Yes. I was taught how to pray in Hebrew by a special tutor that came every day after school to the house and instructed me. In the school, originally in my grammar school years, we had a religious teacher who taught us the history of our Jewish religion. And the praying, I always did in Hebrew.

The family that raised you, can you tell me what they did for a living?

They were in business. We lived in a very, very busy section of the coal mines, very close to it. And my uncle imported every day 10-- sometimes more-- train loads of coal and distributed in the city to all the factories and all the homes. He was a very, very successful businessman, yes.

Did you know much about your father? You mentioned that he died before you were born. Did you know what he did for a living?

My father, I was told, was a traveling salesman. I didn't know too much until later. I only remember, it was a sad remembrance that my mother took me one time-- maybe I was three years old-- to the cemetery in town of Radom where my father lived and died. She took me to the cemetery. And I cried and I was afraid. I was a child, I was a baby, I didn't understand where I was. But mother didn't tell me much.

As I was growing up, I used to ask questions and I was sorry that I didn't have a daddy. I was rather very, very well liked-- loved rather-- by my uncle. So I didn't miss the father figure in the early years. But as I grew older, my friends had fathers. And I began to realize that I was not as fortunate to have my own father.

And I learned little bits here and there, but I think I learned more about it since I was getting older and I begin to find here and there some members of the family. In fact, there's only one that lives in Australia who is a nephew of my father's, who also was only 13 when my parents, I think, got married. And he has some sketches. He doesn't remember. He's now 92 years old, and I met him 10, 12 years ago when I went to Australia.

When you were growing up in Poland, did you experience any antisemitism?

I personally could remember sketches of it, because we were living in a predominantly Catholic surroundings. And we were going to separate schools. As I said before, the grammar schools was separate because we were Jewish. We had Jewish teachers. We had Jewish-- the director was Jewish.

And then the gymnasium was already a little bit antisemitic by selecting us. Not many of us could go into the gymnasium, only those people who had enough to pay for it. It was private and you had to pay a certain amount monthly. And if you couldn't afford it, you just didn't go.

But there were incidents of antisemitism very much, but that was accepted because we were living in a predominantly Catholic society. And you read in the paper, but somehow we tried to live with it.

Could you give me a specific example of what you mean that you saw things, or what did you personally see with your own eyes?

I didn't realize it when I was growing up, what it is. But when the war broke out, I began to feel it because the polls were often telling on us. They were-- if, for instance, we were trying to hide from the atrocities of the German occupation, we had to be careful not to be seen by the Polish people because they would tell on us.

But it wasn't as bad as I learned later in life. I understood it different. I used to go around with some non-Jewish friends, but it was on a very gentle and careful acquaintances. A couple of them were not very polite, so we had our own crowd.

But you see, I lived in a small town. Maybe in bigger cities, they would feel it different. I know, for instance, my husband was growing up in Warsaw. And he told me many times that when he entered the university the first year, he was going in for premed. He could not be sitting in the benches. He had to stand at the back because he was Jewish.

But you, yourself, did not see--

I didn't feel it as much as some other people did.

Prior to 1939 when the war broke out, did you have any idea of what was going on inside of Germany?

We read in the papers. You heard it on the radio. And you always thought, well, it's not going to get there. You try to minimize it. You hoped that it wouldn't get to a war. But when it finally did, we realized that there's nothing we could do. And we followed whatever the other people-- everybody was running because when you finally-- you read in the paper about Kristallnacht in Germany. You couldn't help but realize what's going on.

And when they entered, they took out-- on entering a city, they would take out predominantly the intelligentsia-- the lawyers, the doctors, the people who could eventually lead a revolt-- what they would think, they would suspect. And they shot them, they killed them. They took Poland with such horror that everybody was scared of what might happen to us.

The people that were taken and shot, are you talking about Jewish?

Definitely.

Not Polish, or also Polish?

Only Jewish. Only Jewish. That's how they-- their main goal was to take care of the Jews so that there would be no more Jews. They were trying to annihilate us from the very start. And it was very, very scary.

I'd like to go back for one moment to Kristallnacht. And what do you remember reading or hearing about from that event?

That they came in the middle of the night and broke into the temples, synagogues, and to stores-- to businesses-- and wrecked everything, wrecked, and, of course, also arrested the owners and only the Jewish people. That's why they call it Kristallnacht, because so much glass was broken. And that was scary, that was very scary.

And naturally, when they came into Poland, that was after they have entered, I believe, Czechoslovakia. The Germans have a nature of doing everything according to plan. Everything was what they call in German planmäßig. Whatever they did, they probably kept records of too. That's why we now have so many records.

How was Kristallnacht presented in the Polish newspapers?

As it happened just that Germany was trying to eradicate the Jewish people. And it was always while Poland was still Poland. They could tell what they have seen, what they have heard. They came in with a blast, so to speak. They took the German people and the German nation first, naturally, because it started in Germany. But we were prepared for the worst when they came into Poland. They were flying with bombs overhead. And naturally, everybody was running for shelter.

And also, we, as a family, tried to run. We didn't have cars like we have in America. But if you had a horse and carriage, or a horse and wagon, you could load your family, which my uncle did, and run. We thought if we crossed the Vistula, we'll be safe. We'll go to grandmother's house, which was close to the Vistula. But everybody was running from there

too. Everybody was running, running to save their lives.

And unfortunately, we wound up in the Ukraine, which we couldn't go any further because we didn't have any money. And we stayed there a few months by the mercy of the local people. We were taken into homes and given food. And when the little money we had run out, we had to start thinking of going back. And it was a very, very difficult situation because you didn't know what you will find when you go back.

So as a young adult in the family, I was delegated to go back to Poland. And I had to smuggle myself through the frozen rivers. It was very difficult because I had no money. The only way you could bribe a Russian guard if you had a watch to give them. They call it chasy. And I didn't have that.

But somehow-- it's hard to remember how I managed-- I made it back to Poland where my mother was still living in the nearby town. And another aunt, my mother's sister, lived in another town. But I couldn't go back to my family to report that our house was confiscated, because it was on the Main Street in our town.

And the Germans came in and took over the prominent homes and apartments and renamed the street, even, to Adolf Hitler Strasse, which we had no place to come back. Somehow, people kept going in both directions because people were smuggling to run again. And my family finally, not knowing what happened to me, decided to come back. And they smuggled themselves with the children-- two young children-- and they came back.

When they returned to our hometown, by that time, they already had a Jewish community center, so to speak of. They organized-- the Germans tried to organize us, Jews, because they didn't want to deal with each individual. The Kultusgemeinde, so to speak, which was the office where the Jews had to register and had to be governed by the Jews.

So we were assigned an apartment, and we started from scratch living on the third floor. Now that was not the ghetto yet, that was still the pre-ghetto time. We could still go out and try to make a living somehow. My uncle couldn't reopen his business. It was confiscated. So I don't remember what he did, but I couldn't go back to school.

Schools were also-- well, by that time, I was already 21. If I wanted to go to university, I was already not allowed because I was Jewish. We had no right to continue our education. So I still was trying to work at my first job that I had gotten before the war broke out.

And gradually, I was not allowed to travel, because my job consisted of traveling every day 7 kilometers to the nearby little town to my secretarial job. And Jews were not permitted to travel on the train, so I had to stop working. And also, they had to take us into the local factories.

The young people had to go and work every day. So I worked in a-- we had a big plant, which was a textile mill prior to the war. And they changed it to answer their needs, and they were making the uniforms for the army. And we were employed every day, but we had to eventually been closed in a ghetto. And every day, we had to walk under guards out of the ghetto to work.

Before I let you go any further, I have a couple of quick questions. You mentioned that at the beginning of the war, you fled to the Ukraine and you spent a few months or so. You're saying, then, that the first winter of the war, is that where you were-- the first winter?

Part of it. Don't forget, winter in that part of the world is very, very bad. In January, I believe, which was the middle of the winter, that's when my family came back. I had gone back prior to that, and I lived with my mother until they came back. That was in the middle of the winter, yes. The winter is long. It lasts from maybe October till sometime in May. We had snow May 3rd.

When you came back and you found that your apartment was now on Adolf Hitler Strasse and the Germans had taken-- Everything.

Were you still able to maintain contact with your mother in the other town?

Yeah, you had to have-- the mail was still functioning. You had to be careful what you were writing. And I used to go by train. I had to have permission to travel to see my mother, yes. I used to go in the beginning. And don't forget, war broke out in '39, September. Here, we're already talking about the beginning of 1940, '41. And in '42, they begin to exterminate us. They begin-- they built concentration camps, and that's when my mother went.

All right, let's stay a little bit slower in our progress through this war. You had mentioned a few moments ago that, at first, you were not living in a ghetto. But later on, there was a ghetto. Can you tell me about the formation of the ghetto?

Yes, they moved us all to a restricted area. And we had-- what do you call-- fence. And only by special permission, you were allowed to exit the gate. And the conditions were so bad. People lived in cramped areas, but that's when they started to eliminate us. It was bad. I remember we had moved again from a third floor apartment to another street-- somebody's former store in one room.

But by that time, my family also was-- two members of the family were eliminated. My uncle's son-in-law had been arrested early in the war. And when his wife, my cousin, who raised me, when she went to see him to visit him, she never returned. She simply disappeared. And my uncle and his two grandchildren and myself lived in that one room.

But we still had-- I remember, we still had a woman Jewish cook that kept the food, if possible, kosher. We didn't have any kosher butchers anymore. But somehow, she was able to come in every day and cook for us. The nights, we had to block out what you call-- the windows were covered. We were not allowed to have any electricity, so to speak.

There were certain members of the community who were prominent members of the community center. So it's not a community center. I can't speak-- the Kultusgemeinde. What is the word for-- you go here to register. What do you call that? Gmina. In Polish, it was called gmina. But it was the official place where we had to go and get our food rations too. We were given stamps to be able to buy food.

Was this a Jewish-run registry that you had to go?

Jewish-run who, in turn, reported to the German authorities.

Was it a Judenrat?

Judenrat, exactly. Judenrat.

Can you tell me briefly-- I forgot to ask you this earlier. Your uncle's family was raising you?

Yeah.

What other members of his family were there?

They had only one daughter. I was their second daughter, except I was not officially adopted. I was not legally adopted, but they raised me from the time I was five years old. They had a daughter. She was married and she had two children. And everybody perished. Everybody perished.

I'd like to get back to the ghetto situation and have you explain a little bit more about what life was actually like in the ghetto.

Well, you had to obey the orders. You were not allowed out unless you were going to work with permission or under guard. You had to wear armbands first-- white armbands with blue Star of David. That was a law. If you were caught without it, you were immediately punished by sending you away to either a work camp in the beginning. But nobody dared take it off, unless they were going for hiding permanent.

Later on, we had to wear the yellow Star of David. And you lived your daily life under such scrutiny that you couldn't possible-- you couldn't attend any movies. You couldn't go to any pleasurable places because you were Jewish. You had to stay in the ghetto. And some people entertained themselves in small groups by playing cards, or reading was still not-- nobody could take us a book away.

I'm going to stop you now, so I can flip the tape.

OK.

This is tape one, side B. We're interviewing Frances Hirshfeld. And you were telling me about life in the ghetto. You said that people were still allowed to read and play cards. Can you tell me about what people ate, if there was any medical care, anything like that?

Well, we ate what we had on rations. Food was rationed. And once in a while, my uncle was able to get out of the ghetto and bring in some butter or meat. But we didn't have meat very often. We were supposed to last on the rations. And food wasn't very-- how do I say it-- wasn't free. So we had to be careful how we managed. We had to get the bread by rations. We'd get the milk by rations. We'd get whatever we had to use to sustain ourselves. It was all very meager.

And I remember, my mother was still cooking a chicken once in a while. She would be rationing it out. Nobody could have an extra helping. But then here, again, I try not to jump, because when you were in concentration camp, it was the worst. But in the ghetto, we still had-- we survived. We somehow survived.

And then we had the nightly, very frequent alerts. We had to be out and be counted. We had what they call a appell. We had to come out and be counted. And then they would gradually deplete us. They would take-- whenever they had a bad time on the front fighting, they would take us together in the market and limit us, like taking the old people and the young children and sending them away. They were trying to keep only those people who could work.

You mentioned you remember your mother rationing chicken. Were you in contact with your mother at this point?

In the beginning, yes, in the beginning.

Of the ghetto?

Yes, in the beginning. Yes, until she was deported in '42. Yes.

Did you see, during your time in the ghetto, any particular tortures or executions or anything like that?

Only when people did something that was illegal according to their rules. They would take people out and beat them in open street and make them tell whatever the people were trying not to tell. And it was very, very dramatic when people would finally succumb and had to be taken away. Whatever they did with them, we all knew that they sent them away to a worse place. We didn't know much until we begin to-- somehow there must have been leaks that the people began to hear of Auschwitz, and that was the worst.

First, they used to send people away to workplaces-- young people who could work. But the older ones and the children, they eliminated, they would send directly to Auschwitz, just like my cousin who went to visit her husband and never came back. And later, we assumed that she was sent to Auschwitz. And in Auschwitz, they burned people alive. They killed them because they had to make room for the new transport.

Getting back to the ghetto, how long were you in this ghetto?

From 1941 till I was deported to Auschwitz-- 1943. Yes, about two years.

And you were in just the one ghetto?

Yes.

In the town of?

Zawiercie.

Before we leave the ghetto, is there anything else you want to tell me about life in the ghetto?

It was miserable. It was-- we were living a very limited life. And we couldn't-- the schools were not open for the youngins. We were suffering. We were hoping that every day maybe the war will end. But unfortunately, the war didn't.

If you were caught doing something that was against their law, their rules, you were punished very severely. It was very difficult to live, very difficult to live. It's hard to describe it because we were only fighting for survival in order not to be shipped away.

Tell me about the transports. When did the transports seriously start?

Seriously in '42, '43. If you could survive a transport, you were very fortunate. But you lived in constant fear that you survived this one, you probably won't survive the next one. I was sent directly to Auschwitz because-- this was already 1943 in one of the few last transports-- because they just had too many people to deal with and they had to get rid of us.

And when you came to Auschwitz, they came in the middle of the night, knocked on the door, awakened you in the middle of your sleep. Even though you were afraid to go to sleep, you fell asleep. And then they told us-- they gave us only orders that we can take whatever we can carry-- the most precious possessions. So mothers took children, others carried a few little possessions in their hands.

And when we came to the market to the assembly place, we were selected-- they took us to a train. And my town was not too far away, maybe two, three hours by train from Auschwitz. So we are loaded on the cattle cars just like sardines. We were pushed in those cars standing as many as they could pack us in.

And when we arrived, they told us to leave all our possessions. They just took us as we were into a place where we were told again to strip all our clothes. And stark naked, they shaved our heads off. They shaved every hair that you had on your body and gave us the number. They tattooed a number on us because that's how they dehumanized us. We stopped being human. We begin to be a number.

And they started rationing out clothing. They put us in front of piles that people had left. And they were full of lice, but they told us that we had to strip because we brought in lice. But here, we picked up clothes from the dirt, from the ground, and they were dirty. If you complained that you took something that didn't fit, I was smacked in my face that my teeth shook because I complained my dress was too tight or too long. And it was a dress that was made out of the striped material.

And then you had to put a number on your sleeve. It was a white piece of cloth with a printed number, the same one that you had on your arm, because you covered the arm and they had to know who you are when you entered the so-called work camp. But also, in the winter-- I entered the camp, which was still August. But when winter came and we had to have overcoats, I had to cut out in the back of my coat because they didn't have enough striped clothing.

So they gave us somebody else's coat that somebody else had brought into camp. And it was from regular material, but you had to cut out a window in the back about 20 by 30 inches. It practically covered the whole back. And you had to patch it with the striped material, so that particular person could never try to flee from the camp. And on top of that, you had to-- they put a white paint across my back, so that I was definitely marked not to be able to escape.

I have two questions for you. The first one is, what was your very first impression of Auschwitz when they opened up the cattle car doors?

Hell, because they open up and they tell you to jump down the ground. And there were Nazis, Gestapo with dogs, telling you that you have to leave everything. And with one finger, a young Nazi Gestapo man would determine whether you're going to live or to die. With one finger, he pointed which direction you had to go.

And I remember at that time, that's the last time I saw my uncle and his grandson, who was, at the time, six years old. The little girl was nine years old. She went with me because she was a big girl. She looked older. But unfortunately, I couldn't keep her too long because she was taken away soon after. She couldn't go to work. She was too young for work.

And I was sent to work in a hospital zone at first. And the hospital zone was really, really awful because you are in the middle of Auschwitz where you see the chimney smoke and fire rising every day of the week. And you smell the flesh being-- by that time, you already know that you came into hell. And while I was in the hospital area, I contacted typhoid fever and I survived. I don't know how, I don't know why. I never had any medication. I never had an aspirin. I survived it.

But this was-- don't forget, Auschwitz consisted of Birkenau, which I'm talking about my first few months of life. Later on when they transferred us to work in a munition factory, we were moved to the Auschwitz area where we had brick buildings. But you have been to visit Auschwitz, so you have a slight idea. You can't possibly describe what took place.

So let me make sure I understood. First, you were sent to Birkenau, and later you were transferred to Lager One.

Auschwitz, yeah.

My other question that I had was, what is your number?

56,362.

Can you tell me about the actual living conditions-- where you slept, what you ate.

We were sleeping on planks-- on wooden planks that were three stories. And I forgot to tell you, in the beginning, also in Birkenau, I developed scabies, which is the worst skin disease you can ever, ever experience. And there was no medication for it, and nobody would allow me to sleep with them because it was highly contagious.

But some Hungarian inmate, she was a female doctor, she said to use your own urine to wash yourself with, which I did. And it helped starting to heal. I was-- to this day, I still have a white mark from one of them. It is the most horrible itching disease. I don't wish it on anybody. It's only where it's moisture-- in the wrists, under the arms, near the groin. It is the worst-- the worst. And I survived, I don't know how.

I also would like to mention a terrible, terrible experience where they get at us one rainy, miserable, cold day and told us we're going back to the camp for a show. What they did is they captured a young woman who dared to escape, and she was out for two weeks. She was out in the freedom. She and a male inmate, who was-- she was a girl from Belgium. Her name was Marla. And the reason she was able to escape, she was somebody that is sent around from one camp to the other. What do you call it?

A Laufer

A Laufer, that's a German word. What do you call it in an English?

A messenger?

Messenger. That's the word, a messenger. And she had been very well liked by the Gestapo authorities. Because she was a messenger, she was speaking two or three languages. She was speaking French, she was speaking German. Somehow she was able to get a female guard's uniform. And the male guard with her was able to escape. For two weeks, they were out in freedom. And they got caught.



When they got caught, they were brought back to Auschwitz. And we were told that we were going to see a show, but they actually brought them back to hang them in front of all of us. And the tragedy is that she is-- she didn't survive, but I'll never know who passed her. We didn't know it at the time. Somebody managed to get a razor blade to her and she cut both her wrists, which prevented them from hanging her because she was dead before they were going to perform the hanging.

And then they put her body on a wheelbarrow and made the inmates push her around among us to show what escape can do to a person, that a person is being killed because of escape. We wouldn't dare to escape. And the male-- the man that she ran away with did get hung. He was hanged, unfortunately. So go ahead.

Do you have any idea when that execution was?

Sometime in early '44, maybe late '43-- no, it was early '44, I think.

In Birkenau?

History books have it all written. I saw it myself, yes.

In Birkenau?

Yes. That's something you never forget-- never. And you can't describe it. You would like to open your heart and tell you all what a horror it was, but you can't describe it.

I wanted to ask if you had witnessed any other suicides or executions while you were in Birkenau.

Yes, I saw a woman go in desperation through the barbed wire. She touched it. And a guard shot her while she was trying to kill herself. The guard spotted her and killed her with a gunshot. But she apparently was so desperate, she didn't want to go through. She had lost two children and a husband and her parents. And she was absolutely-- she didn't want to survive. [INAUDIBLE].

I wanted you to take a moment and tell me a little bit more about the work that you did in the hospital zone.

Well, I tried to be with the patients who were very ill. That was before they were sent away to the gas chambers. Some of them-- very few-- survived. But I helped them wash them up and bring them the food-- the rationed food that we had.

One woman, in particular, I'll never forget. She was really eaten up by vermin. She was eaten up. Her flesh was-- oh, it was the most horrible sight I have ever seen. And she was begging to die. She was finally sent away-- still alive-- to the ovens. And I myself got sick with, as I said, typhoid fever, but I survived. I don't understand how, but I survived.

You saw people with pneumonia, people with cholera. That's a horrible thing. People-- when they had cholera, it was so highly contagious. They couldn't hold back the diarrhea. That was awful. And we could not-- we did not have a bathroom in our own building. It was a wooden stable. They called it that this stable holds a thousand horses was written on the doors. We lived in stables.

But we had to go out of that building, go to another one, to use the bathroom or use the washroom to wash ourselves up. Conditions were so inhuman that when I think back, I can't believe that I survived it. But I guess when you're young, you can survive more than you realize.

The bathroom facilities, they were-- the male camp used to be responsible for cleaning out the latrines with their bare hands. I know it because my husband used to tell me. He was, himself, a survivor of Auschwitz and Buchenwald. And he used to talk about it how he had to, with his bare hands, clean out the latrines.

And people were dying like flies from malnutrition, from hunger, from not being able to get any proper medical care. We didn't have any aspirins. If we had fever, we still had to go out and work in order to hide our sickness. And that's

when people got pneumonia and got worse, because the winter is so cruel in Poland.

Don't forget, this was on the Polish territory-- Auschwitz. They had apparently hundreds of camps. They had Dachau. They had Ravensbruck. They had hundreds of them, but I think Auschwitz was the worst.

Was there any camaraderie among the prisoners? Did you have any companion?

Yes, yes. I sort of-- there was somebody who we slept together. We ate together. We kept ourselves-- yes, we did, because, otherwise, how could you survive? If it wouldn't be for my friend-- I was selected once-- with my skin disease, I was selected to go to the ovens. And my friend saved my life by simply noticing that the Nazi Gestapo men turned away, and she pulled me over to her side. They selected us almost daily if they, as I said before, when, on the front, they were losing.

I believe that was during the Russian situation, when they tried to enter Russia and they couldn't. That's when they took out on us. They were coming in and sending in new transports from Hungary, from Romania in the end of the '44 and had to make room for the newcomers, for the new transports. So they sent us away. But somehow, I'm here. I don't know. Fate had, apparently, a lot to do with it.

Tell me about the other work that you did in the camps.

In munition factory, we were selecting-- apparently, they were parts of hand grenades. We didn't know what these parts were. But we had-- we sat around. It was a three shift job. I could never, never survive the night shift. I was always so sleepy. And we had little, tiny parts that we were told that was part of a hand grenade. They were going to another camp to be assembled.

We had-- they manufactured them in one place, and they selected them and sorted them out. And they kept us busy with whatever they could in order to wear us out, starve us to death, send the others in, and get rid of us. But that's what I did, just handwork.

And one night-- it was in the spring when the bombing was during the daytime. They bombed during the daytime. I tried to-- I was so scared when the bombs were arriving. You heard those heavy-- to this day, I don't like the sound of the airplane. We hid under the table because we were working on the outside.

Now how stupid can you be to hide under the table? If a bomb would fall, we would be killed no matter what. But that's how you intuitively ran for life. You were trying to hide no matter what. And then when the bombs fell someplace else, we were returning to work, back to work. They were fussing, fighting, yelling at us that we had no right to be hiding. It was sheer hell. In every instant of life in camp, it was hell.

You mentioned that you could tell when the war effort was not going well because the Germans treated you differently when they were losing. Did you have any other kind of information from the outside world?

No, no, no.

So you had no contact with any--

For instance, when the Warsaw Ghetto uprising took place-- uprising-- we didn't know until some of the people were arriving to the camp. That's when they told us that there was a ghetto uprising and that so many people were killed. And those that were alive, they sent them to Auschwitz. That's when we learned about it.

Do you remember what they told you?

That was what you have read in your history books, that the people were dying in the sewers. They were trying to survive, and they were dying one by one. And it was horrible when the Germans raided the ghetto and when they caught somebody who was trying to steal something from the other person.

It was unbelievable what took place in the ghettos. The people who have survived-- and few of them did-- wrote in their live's history that it was absolutely awful. It was awful.

I'm going to stop you now and flip the tape.