Doing an oral history with Mr. Henry Kanner. OK.

All right.

Sure.

What I would like to do, is there a particular area that you would like to talk about, Mr. Kanner, before the war? Your life before the war, during the war or after? Or would you like to just start where you feel most comfortable, where your family is from, what their practice-- what jobs they had? That type of thing. Whatever you feel most comfortable with.

OK, I think it needs to be said that I, when the war broke out in 1939, I was 12 years old. So that some of my recollections are rather vague. However, I do remember certain pertinent data. I do know that my father was originally born in Przemysl, which is a town near Lemberg. He then went to Austria where he met my mother in Vienna. Excuse me, in Vienna or Carlsbad. I'm not sure.

They were married in Austria. They then lived for a period of time in Frankfurt, Frankfurt-am-Main, in Germany, where my oldest sister, Rachel, was born in February of 1923.

They had then eventually moved back to Poland and settled in Kraków, where I was born and my second sister was born. I was born in 1927. My second sister, I believe, was born in 1931.

And then, from Kraków, I should say-- yes, from Kraków we had emigrated or moved to a small town in southern Poland by the name of Kety. And this, I probably was about seven years old when we moved over there, so that my fundamental recollection about from that age.

I vividly recall the outbreak of the Second World War. I remember that there were apprehension. I overheard my parents. And then, one day, simply a lot of people began to flee the town where we lived in. And we fled with them.

Although I was very young, I do remember it was kind of a chaotic. Everybody ran. Nobody really knew where. And we ran on foot for a long period of time.

And then, finally, we all piled into some kind of a train that was going east. Everybody was running east, not knowing why. But of course, I assumed that was basically because it was in the opposite direction of where the Germans were coming from.

We went as far as a town by the name of Tarnów, where we were looking for lodging. We got off the train because the tracks ahead of us were bombed. I remember seeing for the very first time in my life a lot of dead bodies. And it had a traumatic effect on me.

We left the train. And we went by foot towards the city. And toward the evening, we asked a lady by the roadside. She appeared. She was Jewish. There is no question about it, although I was very little, again.

And she gave us shelter for the night. And the battle for that, for Tarnów occurred at night. And I remember we were all in a basement, and everything was shaking. Shells exploding all over.

And the following morning we got out, and the Germans were in town. And--

You came out.

We came out from the basement, and we started to look around. And surely enough, there were German-- German soldiers all around us.

Since my mother came from Austria, and she spoke-- her mother tongue was German, I remember some German soldiers came by, and my mother spoke to them. And I remember that the conversation was quite

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amicable, and they were--

Did they--

--discussing-- they were discussing things.

No, I don't believe that-- the front soldier, at that point, really, these were really the fighting troops, that they cared or had any interest in Jews per se. They found someone who spoke their language. And as far as they were concerned, that was it. In fact, I recall them returning that same day with some cans of food and handing it to my mother.

About the third day, second or third day, where we went to town, I vividly remember seeing a man in a brown uniform with a big whip in his hand. And he had a Hasidic Jew in front of him. And he was doing the kind of things to-- I mean, he was obviously shaming him. He was hitting him with the whip. And he made him take off his hat, which, to Hasidic Jews, is just about the worst thing you can do. But again, I was very little, and all I-- all I could gather at that point is something strange is happening, and certainly these people are dangerous.

What did your mother or older-- your older sister, did they tell you any reasons for this? Did they have any answers if you had questions?

No, no, because I think the atmosphere around was permeated by the fear, a great fear, which obviously my father and my mother knew. But for reasons that I can only assume, they preferred not to communicate to us in a direct sense, except there was no question that my parents were distraught, and they were fearful.

And yes, I remember them talking quietly to one another an awful lot. No, they did not come to us in a specific way, in a specific manner, and say this might happen or that might happen.

If you had a question, they were-- did they put you off, or did they try to answer it?

I, of course, even to a child, the fear permeated. And yes, indeed, I had asked my father in particular. I was confused by two things. I was confused by the German who spoke to my mother and brought food, and by the other German in a brown uniform with a swastika on his arm beating another Jew. I remember at that time that the inconsistency of that troubled me.

And I went to my father. And my father simply said, we are going to be-- and I'm not quoting verbatim, but something to the extent of we are going to be surrounded by very dangerous people, and we will probably have very hard time. But don't fear something will come out of it.

We stayed in Tarnów for several days. And then, for reasons which I don't recall, my parents had elected to return to Kraków, which essentially was my home town. Not to Kety from whence we fled, but rather to Kraków, where we still had some relatives.

We returned to Kraków, and we lived at first in the same apartment with our relatives. And things became rather, for a period of maybe six to eight months, rather uneventful, with one exception, that there were-- there was no education for Jewish children, and I suddenly did not go to school anymore.

Were you in a ghetto-type area?

No, there was no ghetto established at that point yet.

But the law was just that you could not go to school.

No. The law-- no, no. Indeed, the law was that there were no schools to be provided for Jews. So that there was no organized educational system for the Jewish children other than perhaps an underground one, which I was not aware of.

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I recall that an edict came out very quickly which said that all Jews must wear armbands. And I remember also, being very young, that I flagrantly disobeyed it, and walked around without it.

I was apprehended once by the Polish police. The policeman who apprehended me-- must have been a ridiculous situation, because I was just a little boy. But anyway, he marched me off to the-- to the office of-- the local office of the police. And there he presented me to the man in charge.

I am perhaps giving it a rare other side of the story. But his superior, when he brought me in, looked at the policeman, and kind of, don't you have anything better to do? And looked at me. And he says, you know, the law says you should be wearing it. And then he turned to the officer sitting next to him. He says, how do you expect children to know what laws are-- particularly stupid laws? There were these rare occasions where people did exercise judgment.

Did you know-- do you know his name at all?

No, I don't. It was a one-time occurrence. He told me, put this thing on and get thee home kind of thing.

And I remember my father had found a job working for a German firm. My father was a-- he had a fur business, a furrier. But he was in business for himself prior to the war.

However, during the war he found a job with a German fur firm that had opened a division in occupied Poland. And to the best of my recollection, he had a very good rapport with the civilian Germans who were in charge of that firm. Obviously, they were interested in-- probably in my father's-- in the quality of my father's performance and nothing else.

I recall then-- and I don't remember exactly the chronology-- the edict that was pasted all over the city of Kraków that had commanded all the Jews, or that had notified the Jews of the establishment of a ghetto, and in strict terms indicated that these are the boundaries of the ghetto. And as usual, as any notice published by the German authorities, they always ended, non-compliance will be met by death sentence.

Luckily enough, or strangely enough, we lived within the confines of what was to become the ghetto. Interesting--

So you had your house and--

Right. Interestingly enough the ghetto, was not formed in a traditional Jewish section of Poland. Kraków. I should say Kraków, not Poland. In Kraków, the traditional Jewish section was called Kazimierz. And it was probably the seat of Jewish learning for Eastern Europe. For about 400 or more years, Jews lived within that district. And of course, the Germans saw fit to move the ghetto or put the ghetto in a section where very few Jews had lived. There were some, but very few.

In any event, I remember them, shortly after the publication, workers started to build walls. In other words, if there were a street with a connecting street, two blocks were connected by a solid concrete wall. Not just any wall. They had beautiful little arches on top to make it pretty.

About how big an area was it? Do you recall, that the enclosure--

In terms of what? In terms of how many blocks? No, I don't know. I really don't know, since blocks were not as easily defined in the city of Kraków as they might be by us. One block might be five times bigger than the other one. I don't really recall.

I do recall that with-- almost immediately, I think-- no, let me retract this, or let me change this. In direct response to your question, the area was obviously too small, because even though I was very little, I recall that the Jewish government, or as they referred to, the Yiddishe Gemeinde, had immediately issued an edict that there must be at least five people to a room in order to accommodate all the Jews from the city in the ghetto. And I remember that we had to take all our relatives into our apartment. And we managed somehow.

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Things became much, much more difficult once the ghetto was established, since, of course, we could no longer freely go to different sections of the city, or even maybe outside of the city, to get some food. The black market was the biggest source of anything.

And you could do some trading. I didn't. I was too little, I guess, but I do know that my father was exchanging goods for food.

Once you were in the ghetto, the only way you could leave the ghetto was in groups, work groups that had to-- went to specific work assignments. I recall that certain people had individual passes which allowed them to leave in the morning. But by a certain time-- I don't remember what it was-- all Jews had to be in the ghetto.

My first recollection of any transports from the ghetto-- I don't remember the chronology, but I recall I had a very young cousin. And there appeared notices saying that the Germans were building, in the east, a camp for Jews, and described the conditions in those camps as far superior to those that existed in the ghetto, and actively encouraged them. There was no pushing. There was no threat. There was just almost kind of an enticement. There is a good deal for you. Why don't you?

And my young cousin volunteered. And she says, I will write to you as soon as I get there, and perhaps you all can come, and-- so we can be together. She acted-- she volunteered to be the scout. Of course, today we know where she went.

Would you like to tell for the tape?

She obviously went to one of the camps where she was immediately gassed and put to death. Which one, I don't know. However, I would believe that it probably was-- it certainly was not Auschwitz or any other one. It might have been Sobibor or one of the other ones where people went strictly for one purpose, and that is to be put to death by one means or another.

And that was still very early in the war. I would believe maybe 1941 or '42. And they were still experimenting with the methods of killing Jews. So she could have been killed by going into a truck with a reverse exhaust in it, or she might have been shot, or any other things.

In any event, I'm trying to keep the chronology. I don't know how well I do. The enticement became less subtle afterwards, because I remember one time we woke up, and my father woke us all up-- and that was really first time where I noticed there was terror in his eyes-- and told us, look.

And since our windows-- our house was right at the edge of the ghetto so that our windows, from our windows, we could look out of the ghetto. The ghetto was surrounded by German soldiers. Actually, they were not. So they were the special troops. And they apparently surrounded the ghetto at night.

In the morning, loudspeakers came by. Trucks with loudspeakers came by and ordered all Jews to assemble in a certain square of the ghetto, where people assembled district by district, section of the ghetto by section of the ghetto. And for one reason or another, we never left our apartment. Perhaps they reached their quota or whatever it was. But we do know that many thousands of people from the Warsaw Ghetto were put on the train and taken away.

At that time, I recall some people mentioning-- one or two-- that someone had said that people are being put to death. I remember that the response to that was invariably you have to be crazy. Whoever spreads rumors like that is a rumor monger, and he's trying to create trouble for us. That was the first.

Now when they had taken all these people, these thousands of people out of the ghetto, the following day they immediately issued an edict that the ghetto, the size of the ghetto, was to be made much smaller. And at that point again we were lucky because our part was-- would remain within the proscribed ghetto.

[SIGHS] We then had to accommodate in our apartment as many people as possible. And again, the edict

was 10 people in a room. And we had accepted. My parents had accepted 10 people in a room. And that lasted several months. I don't remember the exact dates.

However, shortly thereafter, there came another transport. And an SS man came into our apartment, and he asked my father where he worked. That was the ticket to survival for the longest time-- where you were employed. At that time, my father was employed by a German firm, which apparently had some importance.

And I was already employed, although I was very young. I was already employed in a German hospital. And that was a hospital. It was a-- more than a hospital. It was a receiving point for all the soldiers from the front. And my job over there was to take the bloody uniforms and throw them in some laundry equipment.

In any event, I had, of course, the certificate that I was employed by them. So when this SS man jumped into our front with guns drawn, and immediately asked, Ausweise, which means show me where-- and my father pulled his, and he looked at mine, and said-- just ordered us to the side.

And my grandmother lived with us. And he just looked at my grandmother. And he said, in German, get the old one out. Otherwise, she'll be dead in 15 minutes when the-- she used to refer to them, and we know today, Einsatzgruppen will be here.

And sure enough, within minutes, we heard an awful lot of shooting. But our courtyard was the last one in a kind of a labyrinth. So they never got, for one reason or another.

In any event, my father, I remember today, crying. Had put a knapsack on my grandmother, who must have been very old then-- she must have been in her late 60s-- and escorted her to the group of people who were going to the assembly point. I remember like today my father crying, saying, what am I going to say to my brother, my uncle who at the beginning of the war escaped to Russia? We didn't know where he was.

The shooting stopped. The Germans disappeared. And we went out to the surrounding courtyards and found a lot of dead people.

And again, for a period of about several months, not too long, there was nothing but terror. People lived from day to day-- until one day, the Germans again surrounded the ghetto. And at this time, they decided that 90% of the people in the ghetto were to go. And of course, we did not, this time, escape the troops. We had to go, and we had to go to the assembly point in that little square.

My mother and my three sisters were with me, and my father, who for some reason was-- oh, yes, I remember the reason. My father separated. He says, I have to find the German that I work for. He might be out there because he told me that he would be present in case he heard of anything. And I will speak to him. Perhaps he can be of some help.

Am I getting too much detail?

No, this is fine.

And we went to that square. And I was with my mother and with my three sisters. And we were put in a line. And at the front of the line, there was a SS officer who, as people went to him, would separate immediately women and children and elderly people to the side, to the left side, and put them across the street. And they were standing.

Now this is before you got to a camp.

That's still in the ghetto of Kraków. And I put myself in front of my mother. And he looked at me. And I think I was 13, 14. And he just barked at me, Wo arbeitest du? Which translates into, Where do you work? And I quickly told him that I work in a German hospital. And he just motioned me to go to the right.

And at the same time, he moved my mother, without asking a word, my mother and my three sisters to the street. And I ran to him. I didn't move. And I said, this is my mother and my sisters. Please. And he barked

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at me, do you-- he said to me, one more word out of you, and, he says, you'll be joining them, dead.

And I stayed on this side of the street, which apparently was the side of the street where people were saved. And my mother was just across the street from me. And he separated no more than 10 yards.

And my mother's last words to me, from across the street, were, Look at your mother and look at your sister, because you will never see them again. These were the last words my mother said to me.

And then we were taken to a-- we were escorted to another little square which was around the block. And from there, we watched the vast majority of the ghetto escorted to the main square from where they were escorted, to the train depot.

I saw from afar my father. I saw the grief on his face. I screamed at him, but he never heard me, and he just went with the throngs.

Immediately, upon this last transport-- which, by the way, I recall vividly, resulted in more people being shot on sight than anyone else-- than any other one, because there was tremendous amount of shooting going all around. There was one man-- I do not recall his name, but he was known as "The Butcher." I remember him going, going to the people that were walking to the transport. And he had a pistol in his hand. And he would grab people out, put them on the side, and shoot them. And he was smiling all the time.

And then I would see him go into a doorway, and you would hear a series of shots. And then you would see people being dragged out.

[SIGHS] I don't recall where I spent the first night, but I remember being totally-- I didn't. I was 14, and all of a sudden, I realized what was happening, and I believed that my parents were and my sisters were going to be put to death. And I didn't know what to do.

That night, I remember there came an edict from, again, from the whatever remained. There were very few people remaining in the ghetto. But the Germans, I think, had required the Jews to pay a certain amount of money. And everyone was ordered to give whatever they have.

And I remember, I went to the-- to the house where the Jewish-- call it government or whatever you want to call them. In German they called them the Yiddishe Gemeinde. And the head of this thing, I remember. I see him like today.

And you had to have some kind of a mark, I think, to show evidence that you had paid. And I said to-- I said to him, I cannot pay anything. I don't even know what's going on. I remember when we were in a courtyard of that house, and there were bodies piled all over. Must have been very shortly, must have been maybe hours after this thing. And he looked at me, and he was crying bitterly. You could see him. But he reached somewhere, and he gave me this whatever it was that I needed to prove that it was--

I slept on the streets for the next, I don't remember, one week, two weeks. I was very bewildered. And I remember that the only thing in my mind was that I had to get out of there somehow. And [SIGHS] I was resourceful enough to make my way out through the gates of the ghetto. My clothes-- my clothing must have been in tatters then, and I must have smelt like something else, since I believe the--

[AUDIO OUT]

--remember that I ran through-- not "ran through." I somehow slipped through the gates of the ghetto, and I simply went into the countryside. We used to know some people. My father used to know some people, Gentiles. And I knew where they lived. And I went to them.

I remember I went to one. Heh. I remember his name. His name was a lawyer. His name was Piatkowski. And I remember, I came to them, and they looked at me, and they gave me a piece of bread, and they told me to quickly get lost, so to speak, since my present-- my presence would endanger them greatly.

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And I slept in barns, anywhere where it was possible to spend the night. And I-- there was no plan in my mind. There was really nothing.

That you were by yourself. There was no one else who--

Totally by myself. Totally by myself. I simply knew, somewhere in my conscious, that if I stayed in the ghetto I would be dead. And I did not want to be dead. That I remember very much. I wanted to be alive. Maybe it was-- but in retrospect it was tremendously selfish. But that was the instinct that I had then. I regret it today, but that's what I felt then.

I met, after about a week, I guess, I met someone, a Pole who was the son of someone that my father had known. And I saw him in the street, and I approached him if he would help me. And he told me to meet him in a certain place in the evening. And when I met them, they were-- they had a cell. It was a cell of what they used to call them Polish, Armia Krajowa, or the secret army, the resistance army, the Polish resistance army.

I remember there were about six or seven people. And a great debate that night was why he brought a Jew. And finally they went into a corner, and they talked, and they decided that I could serve a purpose because I was so young and because I spoke German fluently because of my mother-- I spoke both Polish and German fluently-- that I could serve a purpose to them as a courier. I didn't know what a courier was then, and even afterwards for quite a long time.

In any event, they kept me hidden on a farm for a period of about two weeks. Then they told me that I would be going into Germany, which surprised me. Why would I be going in the heart of the monster. But they said, well, you're a part of us, and this is the kind of work we do.

And they told me that I would have-- that they would steal me across the border of the occupied Poland into Germany proper. And then I was to board a train in Katowice and take the train to Vienna. And when I arrived in Vienna, I had an address, and I had to give a piece of paper, which they told me to swallow in case I was apprehended. I had no idea at all.

In any event, I successfully got across the border, and I successfully got into Germany proper, and I got into Katowice. And without too much problem, I got into the railroad station.

I purchased a ticket without anyone asking me why. And I must have been looking rather ridiculous. Like I said, my clothing must have looked like something else. They sold me the ticket to Vienna. I boarded a train, and off we went. Little did I know what was involved.

At one point, some railroad-- the conductor or employee-- came by, and he said prepare your documents. We are going to be going through this section of Czechoslovakia. And apparently they would-- they had all these bureaucratic things, whatever it was. And I decided that I best be traveling as quiet as possible, so I went into the toilet. And I locked myself in there-- which was an error, because people wanted to use the toilet, and they banged on it, and they couldn't open it. And it was occupied and occupied and occupied.

And finally I heard somebody opening, with a key, the door to the toilet, and looking at me. And the next thing I knew, there materialized what they used to call Bahnhof Polizei, which is railroad police. This guy takes one look at me and he says, would you care to tell me who you are? And I said, yes, I'm going to my family in Vienna. So he says, that's very nice. And I didn't fool him for one second.

And he said to me, now, would you-- you wouldn't mind giving me your Reisepapiere, or your traveling papers. And I bravely showed him my ticket. So he says, you're Jewish aren't you? All in German.

And at that point, I started to plead with him. I said, please, allow me to live. These were the words. I said, "allow me to live." If you hand me in, they will kill me.

The man listened. He said-- he listened. I could see it. He had a heart. But he said to me, look, if I let you go, at best, somebody else will catch you. He says, you have no chance on this train. And he says, at worst

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they're going to put me with you.

So at next the stop was-- he apparently telegraphed, because at the next stop there was a city in Silesia called Ratibor. And they took me into the police station. That was in the middle of the night. They pulled me off the train, put me in a police station.

And the police in the station weren't very smart, because I asked them to go to the toilet. And in the toilet, I destroyed every shred of paper, of incriminating paper I might have had on me. I flushed it down.

And they weren't really bad people. They gave me something to eat.

In the morning, there appeared two policemen in full dress, in uniform, with bayonets and the thing. And they escorted me across town. That must have been some picture, a little me and two guys with bayonets walking me behind them.

They took me to the Gestapo. The Gestapo first started to do a job on me. And they asked me who I was. And I refused to tell them. So he smiled and he says, well, that's OK. He says, you don't want to make it easy, we'll do it some other away.

They beat the living daylights out of me, after which I told them everything they wanted to know, except, of course, I knew I didn't have to tell them that I was with a resistance group or that I had any papers to deliver. I just played it dumb. I said, I lost my parents, and I know my mother was in Vienna, and I just thought it was a good idea to go to Vienna.

They didn't buy it. So they put me into the local jail where they kept me in solitary confinement for six months-- no, four months.

At 14 years of age.

And they would periodically take me at different times of the day or night from the cell, escort me to the Gestapo headquarters, beat the living daylights out of me, suggesting that-- they never knew what, but they were suggesting that I was a part of something bigger than I was telling them. And I kept on telling them I was just a kid. And they kept on-- OK.

So after a while, I learned that if I didn't cover my head-- and they had some pretty powerful things in their hands-- that if I didn't cover my head, and if I got struck in the head quick enough, I'd pass out. And I couldn't care what happened afterwards.

So they kept me over there about six to six and a half months. After that, I was called back to-- they took me one day to-- there's a very interesting story that happened while I was in the jail.

The head of the jail was not a Gestapo man. He was just a policeman. His name was Schneider, Polizeimeister Schneider. And I remember one time I came, and I was all bloody and black and blue. And I was very hungry, as anyone in the jail was. And he came into my cell screaming like a banshee, and yell at me to get in his office. And he says, you clean my office. You do it this way or I'll show you what I can do.

And while he was screaming-- that's a remarkable thing I remember-- he closed the door. And while he was screaming, between the screams-- he never touched me. Between his screams, he whispered, unter dem Tisch-- under the table.

And I walked. I got under the table. And under the table there was a bottle of milk and bread. And while I was-- and he told me, eat quietly, all this time screaming and banging the table with something so it seemed like he was killing me.

He repeated this maybe four or five times.

Excuse me one second. I'm sorry.

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OK.

OK, I believe that the event that I just recalled with this very, very nice man, who was an aged man-- he must have been probably close to 60 years old. I don't know if you want to call him a Righteous, but he certainly was a good human being. Definitely so. Because I recall like today one time when he looked at me eating, and he sent me back to the cell, he said to me, in German, this is a terrible war. He says, you belong in school, in a classroom, not in a jail.

Anyway, I believe it was six to seven months that I was in a cell. And one day they escorted me. The Gestapo came. I was escorted to a Gestapo office.

And at this time there was no beating. I was very surprised. The Gestapo man who always beat me and interviewed me looked at me, and he says, you are leaving Ratibor. And I looked at him somewhat puzzled. And he tells me, you're going to Auschwitz.

And then, with a gleeful face, he and another SS man said to me, and you know what they do with Jews in Auschwitz? he says. Your bones are going to be burned, and they're going to go out through the chimney.

I had no idea what the man was saying-- none whatever. I knew Auschwitz.

You knew that a camp, or the name Auschwitz?

I knew that Auschwitz was a camp where people were sent and few people, if any, came out. Up till then, Auschwitz to me represented a concentration camp for Poles and other gentiles, but not Jews. I didn't know then what was going on.

Two days later-- oh. Since the Germans were very organized, I was required to sign a number of documents, which subsequently, I realized, saved my life, because I was not just a Jew going to Auschwitz. I had dossier at the Gestapo. And the Gestapo, of course, being well-organized, had to first get Berlin to approve the whole thing. So I was a bona fide political prisoner. Very important, I found out later on.

On the whatever day it was, several days later, I was put in a truck, and they took us to the railroad station. And this Polizeimeister Schneider stood over there. And I was, as I was being escorted, going up into the railroad car, which was a special jail car, special car with cells-- I'm sure they had them for years and years in Germany, but it's the first one for me-- I looked at him, and I said to him, Auf wiedersehen, Herr Polizeimeister.

And he looked at me. And there were tears rolling down his eyes. I will never forget his face. And he said to me, Ja. He said, Auf wiedersehen, mein Kind, which means auf wiedersehen, my child. And he cried.

We were put on a train. And we arrived in Auschwitz. And I was in-- I found myself at Auschwitz. We were stripped. We were shorn. We were given a striped uniform, a pair of wooden clogs, and escorted to a block. And there I met people who were telling me what Auschwitz was all about.

Auschwitz was an experience. But in retrospect, now that I am 56 and have had the benefit of a secondary education, I can relate to the social structure of a concentration camp, which, really, every concentration camp had. And the social structure was that there were strata. There were social strata.

There were the older prisoners who had pretty much the dominating role, dominating role. And of course, at the bottom of the ladder were the last people who came in. And the survival rate among people was very small. And I started to talk to people, and they started-- they told me, aye, yeah, we came with a certain group of 200 and there are four of us left, and things like that.

So there was something in me at all times that wanted to live. And I had determined that to-- in order for me to live, I just can't sit over there, and I've got to join some groups, find out what was going on and how to do it.

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And apparently I succeeded, because after a short period of-- well, "short." After some period of time, much sooner than anyone else-- much sooner than anyone else-- I had managed to get myself into-- out of the killer jobs, which were the road-building jobs, and whatever they have where the chances of survival were nil, but get a job within the camp in a laundry, which was not too bad. And it put me in a position where I could exchange services for food. That is, there were the elite prisoners who worked in, let's say, in the kitchen or what have you, and they could steal food, and they wanted to have a new shirt now.

The laundry where I worked was the laundry from which-- to which only clothing was brought from the Jews that went to the gas chambers. In other words, as they undressed, they bundled this thing. They send it to us for disinfection and for washing. So I consequently had access to shirts and things, anything that could be worn by the elite people. And I was exchanging it for food.

[SIGHS] After a while, I, even though I was Jewish, I managed to become a member of the upper strata of the prisoners. That did not relieve me of the selections.

Now before-- when you say older, you don't necessarily mean older people. You mean people that have been there longer.

Exactly. Exactly. That's very important. Right.

I was still considered, on the rolls of the camp, as Jugendliche, or a minor, which was a very dangerous thing to be, because they didn't want people that were too young or too old. And we had periodical selections where you simply had to stand up. And Dr. Mengele would come down, or somebody else-- not necessarily he alone. And you just have to go naked in front of him. You didn't know which way you're going to go.

And of course, I was young, so I always try to stick my chest out and look very strong and robust. And I managed. I was never-- not "never," but I managed to go through more selections.

At one point, I contracted a sickness which appeared to be typhoid. And that was a death sentence, because I remember I was in a very high fever, and I was hallucinating. And they finally took me to the so-called hospital. And the hospital was the worst place to be.

And the following day, the German came. And he was going through each room, each ward. And he, of course, was pulling all people to the gas chambers, because about an hour after he was, the trucks would pull up.

And he came in the room with-- accompanied by some prisoner doctors. And he asked what was wrong with me. And one of the doctors said that [GERMAN], which translates literally into suspected typhoid.

And I remember stretching myself out, although I was in total fever. I could barely see. I remember stretching myself out to my full five feet or whatever I was, and I addressed the SS man in German. I said, it can't be typhoid, because I don't have any spots.

And he was so taken aback that someone would dare speak to him that he burst out laughing and he walked out of the room. And I didn't know whether I was on the list or off the list.

But they came in a room about a half an hour later, and they took three people out of my room, but I was left. So I called the-- [SIGHS] one of the people that worked in the hospital, the prisoners, and he says, you would have been gone with them. He says, you just amused this guy.

I am missing on many things because it's difficult to remember. But I was in Auschwitz several years, and I witnessed many tragedies. My place at the Appellplatz, or the place where we had to stay twice a day to be counted, was right in front of the execution area, which-- and I have witnessed hundreds of hangings, many hundreds of hangings-- mass hangings, individual hangings.

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My place of work was right across the street from the infamous Block 11 in Auschwitz. Everyone who has been to Auschwitz knows Block 11. I vividly recall several limousines pulling up on occasion to Block 11, and we all knew that that represented another trial. Kind of a review would be held that day.

And the following day, all day long, you would hear small-caliber shots going out. And we knew because the man who did-- who held the people for shooting was a Jew. He came-- he was a-- I remember him. I don't remember his name, but I spoke to him many time.

Prior to the war, he was a performer, kind of a strongman performer. He was very huge, very strong, a mountain of a man. And it was his job. He lived on Block 11. It was his job to take all the sentenced, and hold them in front of that black screen while an SS man would administer the shot in the back of the head. He also assisted in all the hangings.

I remember when they caught-- what was her name? There was an escape of a Jewish girl from Birkenau. I was in Auschwitz Eins, which was the main Auschwitz camp. Birkenau was further on. Most of the Jews were in Birkenau.

I wound up in One only because of my stupid political status, which during one-- I almost forgot. During one selection, I was selected for the gas chamber. And I was already-- I had already the number written on my chest. In other words, a number which I have on my forearm. People that went in the gas chamber, just before they went, they put it on the chest for easy identification later on.

--when one of the people from the office ran out, and he says, are there any political prisoners in this group? And I quickly raised all my hands, and anything I had, not knowing whether I was doing the right thing or the wrong thing.

And he spoke quickly to the SS man right next to him, and he pulled me out. They send me back to the block. I don't know why. Apparently, there was some bureaucracy involved, that my records would have to be pulled or what have you.

By and by, because of-- because of my social status, which I achieved by surviving a number of years in Auschwitz, and having an excellent job which allowed me to trade-- I was not hungry in Auschwitz in the last year. Before that, there, oh, yeah, I almost died of hunger. But the last year, no, I was not hungry.

This may sound strange to you, but no, I had all the food I needed by simply trading, trading one for another. There were side to concentration camps which people don't realize.

In January of 1945, you could hear the unrest. There were rumors that the Russians are coming closer and that the camp may be evacuated. I don't remember the name of the last camp commander, but I remember that the day before the camp was evacuated, we were all assembled. And this SS man, who was the camp commander, spoke to us.

And he says, I know where you think you're going, he says, but believe me, you are not. You are going to be transported. Because we all thought we were going to be gassed or shot.

Do you remember who that was? Do you remember the name?

I don't. He was the last commander of Auschwitz Eins-- so Auschwitz One. There had to be a touch of humanity in him to have said that.

It was a bitter January, bitter cold January. We were escorted for many, many miles on foot. And they were shooting people who fell behind. And the sides of the road were littered with bodies.

I don't know where we went, in which direction we went. But I do know that many people were killed. Also, many people escaped, I subsequently found out.

After several days of driving, and running on foot in bitter cold, we came to some kind of a railroad depot.

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And we were put in cattle-- well, coal cars, because they were open. I wound up in a car with a lot of German kapos.

The German kapos were the-- when the Germans first established concentration camps, they needed supervisors. And they wanted a special kind of supervisors. So what they had done is they had emptied their jails of the most hardened criminals, put them in a concentration camp, and made them kapos-- kapos, overseers. And I wound up, for some dumb thing, in a car full of them. We were very scared of them, particularly people of my age, since boys were raped at almost-- at will.

You mentioned other boys your age. Was there at any time, is it-- were you the youngest?

I remember, at any time, I remember I was the youngest around.

So you actually had no one.

I had no one.

You were by yourself, totally.

I was all by myself from the day when my parents were taken away.

I found myself in this car, and I was deathly scared because a number of these kapos had green triangle on their number. And green triangle meaned a homosexual. And anyone of my age and of that age, we heard horror stories. And I was very much afraid, being in a load full of people, that there were not exclusively homosexuals over there, but they were-- there were other criminal people.

In any event, I knew one of them from Auschwitz, and I stayed close to him. There were also other people in the car, because they were packed. We were packed like sardines.

And that first night, when the train started to move, snow fell. And everybody was complaining about how tight everybody was. And I remember one of the Germans saying, don't worry, it's not going to be tight by tomorrow morning. And at night, I heard some cries and moves. And I woke up, and I started looking around. And the kapo that was next to me, he said to me, just stay where you are. Don't move.

But I could see that the other Germans were picking up weaker people, whoever they might have been, and they were throwing them over the side of the car. And there were certainly very-- many fewer people the following morning.

We spent a long time on a train. And many people then died in the car. And they were laying dead. And even the Germans were too weak.

And one day the train stopped. And--

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