

--of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, 1983, Mrs. Adrienne Mathias Krausz, MD, a survivor.

Yeah, I'm a survivor of the Holocaust. I was born in a medium-sized town in Transylvania in 1923. This town, it's this part of the world. And this town was called Transylvania. It is included among the Carpathian Mountains. And it has a specific property that it used to belong alternatively to Hungary, Romania, Hungary, Romania. So as I myself changed my citizenship three times in the same town.

The country changed the citizenship, not the town. And the time when I was born, it was Romania. This part was given to-- this part used to be a part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. And in 1918, after World War I, at the Treaty of Trianon, this was-- this part was passed over to Romania.

My parents, who were born before World War I, were born as Hungarian citizen, were raised as Hungarian citizens. And they were extremely nationalistic as Hungarian citizens. They felt as Hungarian-- so much so that all through the years, they called the passing us over to Romania, they called it the Romanian occupation. And all through that-- those years, my father learned a little bit Romanian, but my mother never spoke Romanian. And I had home a Hungarian upbringing.

So I'm going back to this part of the country then. It was again given by Hitler back to Hungary in 1940, what caused our catastrophe because that's where we were deported from. And in 1945, when I came home from concentration camp, I found to be-- I found it to be again Romania. So I was born in 1923.

Both my parents were doctors and surgeons, what was quite unusual, mainly for my mother that time. They were very respected, well-to-do people. I was raised in a-- if not rich, but very plush and well-to-do surrounding. I was a child without any problems. There were no problems in our family. We were very, very close, loving family.

I had a 10-year-younger sister than me. There were no other children. I was raised by governesses since my mother was a surgeon. I saw her only in the morning and in the evening. She was working the whole day, just like a man.

And since age two, I had a German governess. Since age eight, I had a French governess. Starting age 12, I had a English governess. My sister was born when I had-- when I was 10 year old. And she got my German governess, who came back to be her governess. So this is the family surrounding where I came from.

Did you have a religious background? Did you have a strong Jewish--

No, we were a very assimilated family. Unfortunately, in Hungary, it was a general attitude of intellectuals that they got assimilated. Even my grandparents were not religious. The religious holidays were not observed in our house, not even in my grandparents' house. By the way, my grandfather was a doctor too, one of my grandfathers.

And as a matter of fact, when I was about 10 years old, I saw my girlfriend going to the Sunday school and going with her parents to the synagogue. So since my parents did not want that-- they were agnostic. Since my parents did not wanted to join any synagogue, I took it upon myself to go down to the Orthodox rabbi of the town, introduce myself as a 10-year-old child, and declare that I want to be religious from now on.

And I want to learn religion from him. I was going to a Sunday school until I was-- until I graduated from high school. I didn't have too much in my religious feeling because I'm not religious myself. But it did help a lot to be in my identification with the Jewish-- I mean, to feel that I'm a Jew and learning Jewish history.

So then more intellectually, you understand the Jewish culture and-- from your upbringing. Were your friends Gentile?

We had some Gentile friends. Since we were in the so-called upper 10,000 or upper 400 of the town, certainly, we were not strictly socializing with Jewish people. However, looking back, the friendship that we had with Gentile people was a rather acquaintance type of superficial friendship. The real friends were really the Jewish people who were in the same situation-- lawyers, doctors, engineers also from the intelligentsia, as they called it. So my life was really very pleasant

and very straightforward until 1940.

In 1940, when I was 17 year old, and I had finished my junior year in high school, Hitler decided, in the Treaty of Vienna, to give our part of the country back to Hungary. And together with Hungary, we got the Jewish laws and we got the restrictions. And this was the first time that I was really exposed to feel strongly that I'm a Jew. There was some antisemitic inflict in high school and so on, but too little to make our life miserable. I mean, they respected us.

And it was really not-- in 1940, the Jewish laws were brought in. Now, it started out with the numerus clausus in schools. The numerus clausus meant that Jews only of a certain percentage could go in higher schools, in higher education. It was-- I think the percentage was 4%, if I remember well.

Later, this was changed to numerous nullus, what means in Latin that no Jew-- I mean, numerus is number, and nullus is zero. No Jew could go into higher education. So it started with these laws.

Then started-- continued with the adaptation of some of the Nuremberg laws, like Jewish families not being allowed to keep a Gentile house servant. We had a woman cook and we had a woman maid. And we had to let them go because the Nuremberg laws was based on the fact that the Jewish men from the family may rape the Gentile woman and commit a racial crime. So we had to let our maid go.

And other Jewish law what was brought in was that medical society-- you had to be a member of the medical society in order to be able to practice. My parents were naturally both members. And finally, the medical society decided that they are going to do a numerus clausus even within the medical society.

So since both were doctors, my mother and my father, they decided to have only one of them a member of the medical society. They chose the man. They chose my father. My mother's membership was revoked. And in consequence of this, she was not allowed to practice. So my mother, the surgeon, and I, the student, who never cooked a day in our life, we were cooking and doing all the housework because we had to get our-- let our maid go. So this Jewish-- go ahead.

Did you sense-- then did you sense a strong feeling of antisemitism or any feeling that what was coming personally?

I think the antisemitism was not so strong. I think that it started to be strong, really, when they started to get big eyes about money, and they realized that if they are going to denounce Jews, and Jews are going to be taken away, then they can put their hand on their money and on their belongings.

I think the antisemitism was not really strongly present. It was mechanically made to be there. I mean, they gave them a reason to be antisemitic. Maybe they were antisemitic to the small Jewish butcher or the small Jewish haberdasher who was speaking Yiddish and who was something like an extra person, but they were certainly not strongly antisemitic for us assimilated Jews.

As professional Jews.

Professional Jews, yes. So in contrary, we had a respect in town. But as soon that the town population grasped the fact that they can have-- they can actually gain money, and belongings, and everything if they are denouncing Jews, and if they are-- then they start to enjoy it, and they started to do it with full enjoyment. So it would be very difficult, with so many years back, with 40 years-- over 40 years back, to enumerate all the laws what came in.

Anyway, the most painful in our situation was what I brought up, first of all, that they didn't admitted me to medical school. I had to be a doctor. There was no other thing for me. I mean, it's impossible. I had to follow my parents in their footstep. They wouldn't accept me medical school because I was outside of the numerus clausus. They accepted four students. But I was out.

I mean, they took them on the basis of-- partially grades, but my grades were good enough. However, people have always somebody to push us for them. And I didn't had enough push. Somebody else had more push. So it was-- I was not accepted to medical school. I graduated from high school in 1941.

And I-- in order to-- my father, who had a very strict concept about how to educate a child-- they were very warm, very loving parents, but he was very concerned about the fact that I should not get too much too soon. So I had to work. When I graduated from my high school, my father-- I came home-- and they refused me medical school, I came home, and my father asked me, what are you going to do?

And I said, well, I don't know, nothing. And my father says, no daughter of mine is going to stay home and wait for a man to marry her. You got to do something, whatever you want.

So I did what came to easiest. I was perfect in French. So I took some tutoring for students in high school in French. And I gave them tutoring in maths because I was excellent in maths. So I earned a lot of money by teaching children. And this was going on for the next two years. Now, we are-- this was 1941 up to 1943. In 1943, in August of 1943 or September of 1943-- can we interrupt it for a moment? Excuse me.

So as I mentioned, I was working. But came August 1943, and one of my father's patients suggested him that he has some pull at the Budapest medical school. And he can kind of smuggle me in-- not smuggle me in. The Budapest medical school had a possibility of admitting some so-called irregular type of students. They had different color of index book.

And it was a-- the first year at the Budapest medical school was about 200 students in the first year. And from the very first day, I spotted the three other Jews. So we formed a very tight clique because we couldn't give away to anybody what we are. So we were accepted to the-- I was accepted to the Budapest medical school.

Did you have a special card?

Yes, we had a special card. The special lecture--

But you didn't--

--we called it an index, a lecture book, where you had to introduce all the exams and everything. A normal lecture book was green color, ours was yellow color.

And it was the Jewish people, basically, that had the yellow?

Only the Jewish people.

Only the--

Only the Jewish people.

So you were identified with your--

Yes, but we put a cover on it, certainly, the normal blue color or purple color in order to cover up and not to show it. So I was going to the Budapest medical school from September 1943 until March 1944.

I had a-- my parents were sending me plenty money. I had a very nice rented apartment in Budapest together with one of the other Jewish girl. And I was living a quite normal life aside of the fact that I had to hide my identity. Because otherwise, they would have-- the other students would have thrown me out.

In March of 1944, Hitler entered Hungary, occupied Hungary effectively, bodily with the army. And this is when the main tragedy started. I was on a make-up laboratory for histology with these four-- three other colleagues of mine, Jewish colleagues.

We had to do a make-up because we couldn't enter one of the laboratory experiences. And we had to do a make-up with

an assistant professor who knew about us and knew that we are Jews. And we were sitting at the Budapest medical school in the histology laboratory with this assistant professor when he got a phone call.

He went out to the phone. He came back. And he told us, I suggest that we interrupt now our studies. And you go home, and you lock yourself in. And I suggest you don't move on the street. And we ask him, why? He said, well, I can tell you very confidentially, but don't repeat it that you heard it from me, but the German troops entered Hungary.

Were you aware as a student before the occupation-- right before that that was a threat? Was that something into your awareness?

No, we did not-- we hoped that it's not going to come to us. The naivety and the optimism of people is very striking. My parents were highly cultured and intelligent people. I was not a dummy myself.

We were hearing in the radio that the whole world was burning. Poland was burning, Austria was burning. The German Jews were long time ago. And we still hoped that it's going to avoid us. We still hoped that something is going to happen before it arrives to us. So as I say, we were extremely naive and extremely unrealistic.

Yeah. Well, I guess what I'm trying to ask is-- in the newspapers and in the news if there was awareness on the campus of this kind of thing intellectually, but everyone looked at it as something that was not-- there was information that these things were going on, but out of the awareness of many.

Number one, it was some information, very scant information. And it was rather an information given from mouth to mouth than in the newspapers. In radio, we could hear something when we could get other countries in radio. But we always naively thought that this is blowing up the image, and it's not true, and it's-- only the pessimists are talking like this. It was an old saying going on by us.

When we got already in the midst of our problems, they said, the pessimists are in America. And we are going to concentration camp. We were the optimists. The pessimists left. And they were people who left. They were people who left in good time, and they could get out of the country-- not we, unfortunately.

There was an idea what's going on, but nobody really knew it. So after the Germans entered Hungary, I had quite a problem getting home to my hometown. It's about a 200-300 kilometer train ride.

And unfortunately, the first action of the Germans entering in was to oblige-- to obligate the Jews to wear the Jewish star, to declare curfew, and to stop people in the train station, identify them. We had in our identification card that we are Jews because the religion was listed all over. So identified patients in the-- people in the train stations, and took them off the train, and sent them right away to a collecting area. From where they were shipped out, we didn't know where.

The reason that I had problem getting home was because we heard that people are being arrested in the train station, Jews. And my husband-- my father called me up and said, you don't move. I'm sending somebody to pick you up. He had a patient of that Hungarian detective. And he sent his Hungarian detective in about 10 days to pick me up and to bring me home safely, without a Jewish star. But I was sitting in my room and waiting.

I arrived home. This was already in April. Certainly, we were extremely afraid what's going to go on. My father and my mother was very afraid. My little sister was only 10 year old at that time. She was 10 year younger than me. I was 20. And we were watching what's going on around.

The first thing what happened was that about a week after I got home, they collected all-- they collected about 60 families of Jews in town and took them to jail. These were the most-- the richest families in town. We were not-- we did not-- we were not on the first collecting list. We were well-to-do, but we were not-- these were people who had factories and who were really multi-millionaires.

So the more wealth and prestige that one had--

That's right.

--they were more apt--

That's right, at the beginning.

--because they had this power.

Then later, everybody got collected.

Is that true in all of the countries?

Yes, I think it's true. I think it's related to-- I think it was true even in Germany because the German vandalized and stole the Jewish fortunes. And I think it was true that more prestige you had, unless you could bring your prestige and your money to somebody who for money would take care of smuggling you out, if you couldn't find the right person, then I think that having money and being prestigious was worse than having nothing.

So we didn't get into this first bunch of people. And there would have been still time to go away-- not on our own because you couldn't leave the country. But one of my aunts-- I told you that I'm coming from a very assimilated family.

As a matter of fact, my mother's-- all the sisters and brothers of my mother's married Gentiles. And one of my uncles, through marriage, was a Romanian general over the border. And he sent a Romanian officer in civilian outfit to pick us up and to take us through the border.

And my father refused it categorically. He didn't want to go. He said, it's going to be all right. We are going to be taken care of. So the naivety, again, and the-- they say, every minute a sucker is born. Well, we were suckers.

Was denial and--

Yes, it was a denial, really, it was. It was-- so about a week after they collected these first families, the second collection raid came. This time, since the jail was full, they collected only the men. So they came in around 6 o'clock in the morning to our home. We had a big house, a six-room apartment with kitchen and everything, two bathrooms, two rooms extra for my mother's office, and two room extra for my father's office.

They came in at 6 o'clock in the morning, German SS officers and some soldiers. And in a rude, but not brutal way, they explained us that we have to pack our belongings enough for 24 hours. And we have to leave the house because they are going to take over. They are requisitioning the house. And only when we arrived to the exit of the house with our packs, we knew that they are taking my father to jail. And they are letting us go wherever we want, the three of us-- my mother, my sister, and me.

When this happened at 6 o'clock in the morning-- when this happened at 6 o'clock in the morning, my parents were so confused-- so afraid and so concerned, then they practically didn't know what to do. They were crying on each other's shoulder.

And I remember like today what seemed to me very funny that time, and my mother, who was an intelligent woman, packed an umbrella. She forgot to pack her toothbrush. And I had a little bit clearer mind. I was a very grown-up 20-year-old. And I packed for everybody.

So they-- I forgot to tell one detail. While my father was in jail, he sent me word. We-- he got visiting privileges. And with the visiting privileges, he sent me word that I should come in to visit him.

Before they took him to jail, right after I came home from Budapest, my father was afraid that-- there was a obligation to declare if you have voluta, if you have gold, and if you have guns. My father had a revolver from World War I

because he was in the army. And he had some Napoleon's gold coins. I don't remember exactly what. And he had some dollars and some English pounds.

And being afraid that you have to declare it, and not wanting to declare it, we packed the whole thing in a big metal box. And we went down nighttime with my father, he and me together, in the basement of our house, and dugged a hole, and buried it in the basement.

Well, after he was in jail, I got a word from him that he wants to come in to-- he wants me to come in to visit. So I got a visiting privilege. I went in. The first surprise was that my father turned completely white. He was only 50 year old. And he had dark brown hair. The time when they took him away, he had very few streaks of gray in it. And in a few days, until I went in to visit, he was completely white, snow white. Yeah.

The reason that he wanted me to come in to visit-- he got a moment to whisper to me that he wants me to dig out everything and throw it into the river. Because they are permanently questioning him. And they are permanent-- they are torturing people to tell them where they hid away their belongings. And he's afraid that he's going to speak, being tortured. And he was afraid to get us into trouble.

So he wanted to ease his mind by knowing that this is thrown away, and nobody can find it. So that's what I did. After I visited him, we went together with my mother. My sister was not with us, certainly, she was small. And we went nighttime together with my mother, digged it out, and took it out to the Szamos River what was going through our town, and threw it into the river.

We were staying at my mother's brother, who had his own private hospital. It was a 200-bed hospital. And he was one of the most renown surgeons and university professor of surgery in town.

The way how he escaped the concentration camp was several reasons-- number one, that in World War I, he had the highest grade of decorations. Number two, he married a Catholic woman. Thirdly, my mother's sisters and brothers were all mixed marriages. He married a Catholic woman, and the children were born Catholics.

Now, this wouldn't be enough because everybody who was born Jew or who was not converted many, many years ago was still under the same situation. However, he was such a-- he was in such a high pedestal hold in town, due to his profession, due to his doings with people, that the Catholic Church came to his rescue.

And they falsified a certificate. He never converted-- falsified a certificate that yes, he converted 25 years ago when he married his wife. And the town collected about 70,000 signatures to save him.

By the way, the size of the town where I'm coming home is about 250,000. So we were staying in my brother-- in my uncle's hospital. With the jail being full and with a ghetto being arranged for the Jews outside of the town, after the ghetto was opened, it was not a ghetto as we imagine it here in the United States. It was not a part of the town what is called a ghetto. It was a ghetto barricaded by fences and with very rudimentary barracks, very rudimentary shacks, where the people were sleeping.

And that's when the big collection started. They started to collect everybody. I mean, they collected everybody on the street. They went in homes. They went by knowledge, by denouncement, by-- I mean, everybody could expect to be denounced. Certainly, there were some people who were saved by Gentiles. There were some children who were hid, but very few of them.

When the big collection of the people started, that's when they emptied out the jails and they took out all the Jews who were previously in jails, took them out also to the ghetto. And that's when my father got into the ghetto. And from the ghettos, the transports started to go.

In our naivety, there was another thing what came about. Postcards started to come back from people who were taken away with transports. And the postcard was written that it's coming from Wallsee. And everybody started to speculate where Wallsee is. And finally, they agreed that Wallsee is in Switzerland. And they are taking the Jews to Switzerland.

And only when I arrived to Auschwitz, I found out what Wallsee was. They gave-- they handed us out postcards. And they told us, we are in Wallsee. Write on it that the postcard coming-- comes from Wallsee. I still have the postcard what I had sent home to my uncle. It's in my strong box. And it comes from Wallsee. And that was Auschwitz. So again, the naivety that we--

There was no other-- was there any other speculation that this could possibly be?

Yes, again, the pessimists were talking about the death lagers. And the optimists were not believing them.

And the reality of the ghetto, was that a frightening experience to you? Did you think your life might be threatened?

The reality of the ghetto, it was-- yes, it was a frightening experience. But we didn't thought that it's going to happen in the way it happened. We didn't thought that they are going to empty out the ghettos and take them to death camps. We thought that in the ghetto, the life is going to be miserable, and we are going to be kept there in inhuman conditions, and kept there.

I was never in the ghetto. My father was. My father was there. And the transports started to be taken out. And we were still in my uncle's hospital, my mother, and my sister, and I. And the last transport departed on June 2 of 1944. Excuse me, it was June 7, 1944.

So the last transport was supposed to depart from our town on June 7, 1944. In the morning, around 7 o'clock, we got a phone call in my uncle's hospital from my father. They gave him the right to make one phone call to let us know that he's being taken with the last transport and that he wants to say goodbye to us. And he wants us to stay where we are.

After the conversation finished, my mother got into hysterics. And she decided, we are not going to let my father go alone, that we are going to join him. I tried to talk her out of it. But when I said it, she said-- she called me ungrateful and unloving daughter of my father if I want to stay. So I agreed to it.

We packed our belongings, what we had, as scanty as we had. And we got-- we ordered a horse buggy. There were no taxicabs that time, there were horse buggies. We ordered a horse buggy and went to the train station with the horse buggy voluntarily, the three of us-- my mother, and my sister, and I. And in the train station, with a big difficulty, we found my father, who was brought from the ghetto, and we joined him in the cattle car. And unfortunately, that was the tragedy, but of course, the end of my mother and my sister.

In the cattle car?

In the cattle car-- no, they were exterminated in Auschwitz. They were gassed in Auschwitz. But if my mother wouldn't have done this tantrum and wouldn't have wanted to join my father, they might have been still alive.

So anyway, we boarded the cattle car. I don't know exactly how many we were in the car. Usually, they put 50 to 70 people in a cattle car. Naturally, no place to sleep, just next to each other, one body after the other. There was one bucket for the excrements. And the food was only the one what we brought along with us.

And we took our last journey. We left on the evening of June 7, when the trains were filled up. And we stopped every day, once a day, where the German soldiers came to open the doors. We had locked doors-- came to open the doors, took the buckets out. I mean, they didn't take the buckets out, they appointed one of the Jews to get the bucket out, to empty it out on the lawn somewhere in the forest or somewhere, where the train was passing by, and then bring it back.

So everyone was sleeping together on-- and then everyone saw each other at the same time.

Everybody was sleeping together-- women, men, children, everyone-- no, nothing.

Was there-- what was going on? Where did you think you were going?

That time, we were already very, very afraid. We were very afraid. We still had in mind those postcards what were coming from Wallsee, but we started not to believe them more. And perhaps, the first time on this voyage in the cattle car, we thought that the stories with the death camps are true. And we were extremely afraid. We didn't know what to do.

Was there-- what kind of communication was going on? Was there any-- the spirit, in terms of that, was it a few days of a trip?

Everybody was extremely depressed. People were crying, carrying on. It was a terrible-- it was-- it was like being on-- like a funeral. Everybody was very, very depressed. And everybody was very uncertain of the future, of what happens.

In the same cattle car with me were two very close friends of mine who had married very early. And one was pregnant, and one was with her newborn baby. Naturally, they were both gassed. They were 20 years old. So we arrived to a place with nowhere.

So nobody died on your-- in the train.

No, in our car, nobody. In many cattle cars, they died. And also, in our train, we knew that people had died who were thrown-- just thrown out of the train, but not in our car. In our car, the oldest generation was the generation of my parents. My mother was 45, and my father was 50. I mean, the oldest people in our car were about their age in good health.

And the only baby who was in the car was this friend of mine who was about two, three months old. And the mother breastfed the baby. So the baby was protected by the mother milk.

So we arrived on 11-- after four days of travel, we arrived on the early morning 11 of June. It was still dark outside in a place. My memory says that it was an end station. I don't know if it was true or not. But I had the impression that there was nowhere more rails, that it was an end station.

It was dark. All of a sudden, we realized that the doors of the cattle cars were open. And people were yelling in German, los, los, los, alles heraus, alles heraus. That mean all out, all out. They were also yelling that each mother should hold her own child. And bring your things along with you.

Were you with your mother then and your father?

I was with my mother, with my father, and with my sister. Right. There were German uniforms all over the place. There were some lights, electric lights illuminating the place. But it was still dark in the morning, early morning. And there were a lot of people in-- a lot of men in striped uniforms. And later, much later, we found out that these people are from the Sonderkommando. They were taking the people to the crematorium-- to the gas chambers and the crematorium.

You're at Auschwitz now.

At Auschwitz, yes. Later, we found out that this place is called Auschwitz, and it's in Poland, it's in Oberschlesien, and it is a death camp. When we got out of the train, they ordered us in two columns-- one column for the men and one column for the women.

Now, again, my memory may cheat me. I don't know because everybody is talking about selection being to the left going to death and to the right going to life. Well, in my memory, I was going to the left, and my parents were going to the right. So I don't know-- did our train was placed in an inverse way or what was it? But I still have vividly in my memory that I was ordered to the left. And those who went to the ovens went to the right.

I didn't see my father. First, the women were selected. The selection of our transport was not done by Mengele, was done by a doctor from our town, from our hometown, by the name of Victor Capesius, who was an MD and pharmacist



and who represented in our hometown the Bayer company, medical company. And he was visiting doctors every month, bringing gifts from the Bayer company, selling their products, bringing gifts from the company, having coffee at our house. So he knew personally very well my mother and my father both.

He was visiting?

He was the selecting officer. He was a German. He moved to Germany. And he joined the SS. I know it very well. As a matter of fact, I went to testify against him in Frankfurt in 1964. And due to my testimony, he got nine years, but no more.

Did you know he was antisemitic? Did you have no thoughts of that?

No, we didn't have any inkling about it. We knew that he was German, but we didn't know. Anyway, my mother and my sister were staying next to me. My sister was a 10-year-old child, and she was not a not an overly developed child. I mean, she was a normal little 10-year-old. And my mother had a Red Cross band on her arm. And she was holding my sister at her hand.

And Dr. Capesius was standing there. And my mother turned to him and said, Dr. Capesius, I'm so happy that you are here. Can you send me somewhere where my little girl is well protected? He said, sure, you go to this side, and you will be fine. And he sent my mother and my daughter to the gas chamber-- my sister to the gas chamber.

And he did not know that I'm part of the family. My mother didn't say anything. And he never met me before. I have seen him, but he never met me. So he sent me to the living side-- as I say, my memory, to the left side.

I know from one of the doctors in town who was in the same row with my father, that when he came to selection, he saw my mother and my sister going to-- in that direction. And he again talked to Capesius and ask him that-- told him that I see my wife and my daughter going in that direction, can I go too? And Capesius say, oh, yes, that will be very good for you. And he sent him also to his chamber.

Now, did you know? Did you-- you didn't want to go with them?

I knew it. Nobody asked me to. Nobody asked me to. They were ordered to their side, I was ordered to this side. We didn't know what's going on. Little I knew that I have seen them the last time in my life. I-- we didn't know anything. It was such a shock, such a surprise, such an unbelievable thing what was happening that nobody was thinking, really.

So anyway, I arrived to-- we-- they marched us through certain lagers. And then they took us to a shower place, what was called later we found out Brzezinka. And there, we had to undress completely, to be naked completely. They shaved our hair. And whoever had bad-looking shoes on, they left their shoes. Whoever had good-looking shoes, and you had to take off your shoes, and you got clogs. That's what I got, a pair of Holland clogs, wooden clogs.

And from the shower, after they shaved us and everything, they gave us some rags. They were really rather rags than clothing. And this was Poland. And this in spite of the fact that it was June, but it was cold. The mornings were extremely cold. And it was still early in the morning. And they brought us into a lager with a lot of buildings around.

And what I found out about it that this is the last lager what they built. And they did not have time-- the demand and the arrival from the transports was so big that they didn't have time to install water, running water, and electricity. So we didn't have toilet, we didn't had running water, we didn't have electricity, we didn't have nothing. We didn't have bunks. We were laying on the floor. Everybody got one army blanket. And that was our-- we were about--

Concrete floor?

No, it was wooden floor. It was wooden planks. And instead of bathrooms, we had the latrines, what means a big hole in the ground behind the barracks and with benches around it, where you sat down and you were just doing your necessities into the hole.

Men and women nude together?

No, no, that was between women. The men went in the other direction. It was strictly-- there was no co-ed lagers. They were all separate for women, separate lagers for men, separate lagers for the Gypsies, next to the Gypsy lager. And so the first thing, every block, every building was called a block. And I was in block 9. And every block had a kapo. The kapo was Polish. These kapos were there for two, three, four, five years from Poland.

Jewish?

Jewish. And we went to the kapo and we ask her, where are our families? When are we going to meet them? And the kapo was showing to us, do you see that smoke there? That's where your families are. And we wouldn't believe it. But then slowly, slowly, it got to us. And we started to believe it. We started to. We started to.

So the treatment was atrocious. Every morning it was a Zahlappell. We had to-- Zahlappell means an Appell to count. They counted the prisoners every morning and every afternoon-- twice a day, Zahlappell. It was at 3 o'clock in the morning and 3 o'clock in the afternoon. And 3 o'clock morning was very cold.

We had to stay in line for two, three hours until the SS people came and counted us. And I don't know if it was 3 o'clock or 4 o'clock, but it was not later. And if somebody did a little mistake, the whole bunch was put down to kneel in the mud or to kneel with raised-up hands for hours and hours.

Then other atrocities-- you were going on the Lagerstrasse, on the lager street, and involuntarily, you sat in front of an SS, you got lashes or you could get even shoot-- shot for it. The food was a black coffee in the morning, what we usually didn't drink because we needed something to wash up with. There was no water, so we used it for washing up.

In the lunchtime, it was a soup. That was our lunch, this soup-- usually like a spinach soup, something looking with greens inside. And in the evening, it was one slice of bread. Twice a week, there was a little cube of margarine. And once a week, there was a little slice of salami to it. But a slice of bread was every evening dinner.

The Germans had a perversity to look for doctors for the dirtiest work. Doctors were usually cleaning the toilets, latrines, and so on. So in about a few days after our arrival to Auschwitz, the lager kapo-- not the block kapo, the lager kapo-- announced that whoever is a doctor should report to her. There was no doctor in our transport. Then she asked if there are any medical students.

And I was a-- I had finished my first year of medical school. So I went to her. And she said, well, you are going to be the chlor commander. And you have to get for yourself 10 girls and enroll them into the chlor commander. And I asked her, what's the chlor commander? And she said, you will see.

So we were 11 of us, 10 plus me. They gave us overalls. She told us that we are going to get an additional food allowance, what meant that instead of getting every evening a slice of bread, we were getting every evening a cube of margarine. This is margarine with a slice of bread.

And next morning, they took us out. And next morning, they took us out, and they showed us what a chlor kommando was. We had to clean the latrines and then chlorinate them. So we called it really shit kommando. OK. That's what I was doing.

Let me ask you something.

Yeah.

What were your feelings when you were doing this now? Were-- what was going on, do you think? Were you--

I have two feelings-- I had two feelings, first of-- three. First of all, I started very early to believe in the smoke and the

smell of the burning flesh that was always there. I started to buy their stories. And I had big difficulty with my friends because they called me a pessimist. And they told-- called me a spreader of bad news because they didn't believe in it.

My other feeling, strong feeling, was that I have to eat everything what they give me to support my life. I have to work everything and I have to do everything what they tell me to support my-- to save my life. And the third strong feeling was to try to get out of here no matter how.

Now, we were planning escapes. It was the mother of one of my friends who was an extremely rich woman. They had a leather and shoe factory in our town. And she came to me one day. And she told me that she smuggled in two diamonds in her vagina. She had them with them.

And she said, you just have to find a soldier who would take it and would smuggle us out. And I didn't believe in finding such soldiers. So she went on her own. And she found somebody. And she got out to the border of the camp, where she was shot. So the soldier took the diamond, but denounced her.

OK. So I didn't believe it. My belief was that we have to get out with a transport. Because at that time, we already hear that the transports are going to work camps. And my belief was that we have to go to a work camp.

I tried it once after about a month. The lager kapo recognized me and sent me back to my chlor kommando after getting a few lashes. So I tried it again on August 9, when a transport was taken out, together with a friend of mine, with whom I was together from the very beginning and who was with me in this shit kommando.

So you had two friends that you had-- you had some support there? I mean, two people--

The old lady was gone. That was a old lady. That was a 45, 46-year-old lady, who seemed to me like a very old woman at that time. I was only 40. And she was gone. She was-- she tried to get out. This other friend was the doctor-- the daughter of a doctor from my hometown.

She was really younger than me, two years younger than me. She was 18. She had just graduated high school. And she was a very helpless, very beautiful, charming little girl. Today, she's a doctor in Israel. And Judith and I were together from the very beginning. And I was the one who pushed her to eat everything.

We were spoiled brats home. We were coming from well-to-do families. So who was used to this spinach and these things? I hated it. But I decided that I got to eat everything because that's the only way I support my life. So I pushed Judy. And we stayed together until the end of the deportation, until liberation.

And came August 9, whenever they took out the transport, they put a Blocksperre that mean they locked up the blocks. And only that block what was meant to go with the transport was open. Everybody else was locked in.

Our luck was that we were not locked into the block because we were working at the latrines. And we found out. And I told to all the girls, let's go. And they didn't want to go. So Judy and I, we shed of our overalls, and stayed in our rags, and smuggled ourselves into the transport. And nobody recognized it. And that's how we got out of Auschwitz.

How did you do that? How did you--

Well, we were--

--you took the train that was going back to town?

No, not a train. They were lined up to go to be cleaned at the Brzezinka to be put in trains. They were lined up. They were coming out from their blocks. And a few hundred meters outside was our latrine. And we saw this. So we left our overalls at the latrines and joined the column.

So from there on, we went with the column-- to the cleaning place, to the showers, what was looking exactly the same

like the gas. But it was water coming instead of gas. And actually, people who were gassed always thought that they are going to take a shower. But then the shower was-- the gas was coming.

And they took us to the shower, they loaded us into cattle cars again, and off we went. And that's the way we escaped. I heard, ultimately-- and I didn't meet anybody since who was in our lager-- that they absolutely exterminated the whole lager from where we came. So I think it was the 24th hour when we got out.

From Auschwitz, they took us to Ravensbrück, where we were doing nothing. We were in a quarantine. In Auschwitz, nobody was doing nothing. Only-- I mean, in our lager, there was not a work lager. Everybody--

There was no life, there was no daily schedule.

Nothing, there was nothing. Only the 10 of us had a schedule, the 11 of us. Nobody else had a schedule in our lager. And they took us to Ravensbrück, where they kept us in quarantine for two weeks because they were afraid of some disease. And we were laying on the floor of the Lagerstrasse in a separated area.

And they kept us two weeks there until they realized that we are enough healthy that they can forward us. And they forward us first to a little place called Tachau-- with a T, not with a D. Dachau is the renowned lager. This was called-- a little town called Tachau, with a T, like a town.

And there was a factory who is requested workers. However, by the time our train arrived, the factory was bombed. And they didn't had work for us. So we spent there 24 hours. And then they loaded us again into the cattle cars. And they took us to Germany, to Altenburg, what is in Thuringia, what is in about central Germany.

And there, we were in a big lager. But this time, it was already a work camp. The conditions were bad, but far not so bad like in Auschwitz. We had bunks. We had straw mattresses. We had-- the bunks were three on top of each other. We were sleeping in a big hall like this one and with hundreds and hundreds of prisoners.

We were called haftlinger. We got the striped uniforms. We got also some jackets to wear. And we got served food three times a day. The breakfast was, again, black coffee. But this time, it was a slice of bread with it.

Lunch, it was a soup, but this time, no more the green spinach soup, but some soup with a little piece-- pieces of meat and some little pieces of macaroni or something like this in it, some vegetables. And in the evening, we got, again, the bread with, every evening, margarine and, every evening, a slice of salami on it.

Let me ask you something.

Yes.

Was there any relating at all to the SS personally?

Yes. There was. In some instances-- and there were a few SS people who used us for certain jobs. Like there were a lot of SS women. They liked to have mending of their stockings, repairing of their panties, or brassieres, or their dresses. And if somebody of the prisoners could get under their skin and get the work from them, they were rewarding the person with-- as payment with an apple, or a piece of bread, or a pack of cigarette.

One of the theories about hostages is that if you get to know your captor, you're safe.

No, there was no--

Was there any getting to know?

No, there was none. There was not getting to know. The other side of the story was thanks god, I was exempted from it because it didn't happen by us. But I know for a fact that in many lagers, the girls who were looking very beautiful were

collected and taken as Feld-whores for the SS officers.

Then they were killed?

And then they were killed after. So thanks god, it didn't happen with us. And I don't know of anybody who should have happened. But I know of people with whom it happened. I know friends who came back and whose life is completely destroyed. They escaped. I mean, they didn't escape-- they escaped the ultimate killing. But they were servicing the German soldiers.

To stay alive and the guilt.

Yeah. They were stay-- and not only the guilt, the horror of the whole thing. I mean, they were servicing the lowest grade of German soldier, who was hungry, and who needed a whore. That was it. So no, there was no relation to them.

Where I found relation was in the factory. Because in the factory, they had obligatory workers from the German populations, people who were communists, or people who were not very well seen, or people who were denounced for something. They were almost in the same situation like us.

However, they were living in town. And they were commuting between the factory and town. And with these people, you could make some friends. And you could get some worldly goods from them-- not really friends. They were some of them who were-- felt sorry for us. But other than this, we were treated just like animals. I mean, there was no such thing as being friendly and being--

Where this person has a skill, she can mend my clothes, so--

That was not friendliness. That was like throwing a bone to a dog.

Useful.

OK. And this was going on until April of 1945. We are over? April 1945, on the 12th-- on the 11th of April, we got a announcement that everybody lines up on the Lagerstrasse. In the meanwhile, I don't want to go into details, we got a lot of bombings from the Allies of the lager. And we are wishing the bombs should kill us, but nothing happened. And we are still prisoners.

11 April, in the evening, they lined us up. And through the night, they made us march 45 kilometers. We arrived into a small town called Waldenburg in Saxonia, where they arranged us around the center of the town. They gave to everybody a loaf of bread. And they ordered us to go into the woods, what we are on the hill outside of the town. Being in the woods in the rain and also quite cold, a lot of bombing was going on around us.

All through the night, they were permanently shooting, bombing. It was noise. We didn't know what's going on. The only thing what we realized it too was the morning, most of the SS disappeared around us. At that time, we were already with men. Because when they evacuated the Altenburg lager, they evacuated together the men and the women. And we were marching together. And we were in the forest, men and women.

Two or three SS came up to the men, turned their revolver over, and said, now, you protect me. You know that I was always good to you, and you protect me. So we got a wind of it that something must be going on if the SS were giving them up to us. And the others disappeared.

So it came the morning and daylight. And we choose the commission of three men to send them down to town. And they came back, crying and yelling, that the Americans are here. And that's when 3,000 people ran down from a hill from the forest. You never have seen like herd of elephants. And we ran into the arms of the Americans.

The story in Germany was the Americans didn't really made official arrangements for us. But we were able to break into German houses and to steal. So we had free hand. But as to taking care of us, no, we were not taken care of. The little

town had a hospital. And there was no doctor in town. They were all refugeeed.

So the Americans made an announcement that if there is any doctor among the prisoners-- there was no doctor, then they called for medical students. And we were the two of us again, me and Tibor Braun from Budapest. And we became the big directors of the town hospital. They gave-- the American doctors gave us the hospital in charge, told us to train some personnel for ourselves, gave us an ambulance.

They were located in Meerane, about 50 miles from us, gave us an ambulance, and told us that they are going to come to supervise us once a week. And if anybody is too sick that we can't handle it with an aspirin or with a laxative, we should pack the person in an ambulance and send it over to their hospital to Meerane. One of the doctors, Dr. Roman Kowalik, who is in West Orange, is still my friend. I met him when I came to the United States.

So when did you come?

I came to the United States in 1961 via Israel. From the concentration camp, I went home. I got married in a few months. I went back to--

You went back to your home?

Oh, yes.

To the house?

Oh, yes, to the house. But then the communists took away the house. So it's not the Germans--