

My name is Sonia Myers. I was born in Kovno, Lithuania, a second child in a very religious home. My father was a rabbi. His last name was Reb Zalmen Trakeniski.

Life in Lithuania was really not bad for Jews. At least we were not persecuted, until about 1939, when Hitler started roaming in Europe. We heard many stories.

We first were occupied, naturally, by the Russian Army. And we had many people that were running away from Poland, coming to us and telling us about the atrocities. Like most people all over the world, we couldn't quite believe it. We talked between ourselves that, in particular, we were in college. And there was one boy that ran away from Poland and came to us.

And after he told us all night long what was happening in Poland, we said, he can tell good stories. We really did not quite believe him, just a month later to find out that it was all such a horrible truth. I would say it all happened in one night. I cannot recall quite the date.

I think it was 1941, July, when suddenly there was a nightmare. We heard bombs flying, and people were running all over. And the Lithuanian Army, or whatever was left of it because it was already Russia for a whole year, were running away. And we suddenly heard that the Germans were coming.

And our first hello was on the radio, that for every killed German, hundreds of Jews will be killed. This was our first hello, I guess. And right away people were gathering all over and asking questions, what should we do? Should we go in the morning to work or not?

Some people decided, maybe it's better they should go to work. That same morning, there was a big factory. I think they were making cars. And about, Oh, I don't know how many 100 Jews went to work. And they were drowned with the pipes of water, drowned through their mouths.

That was the first nightmare, not by the Germans but our beautiful Lithuanians, who turned out to be the biggest murderers, I would say, in all of Europe. They were so good murdering the Jews in Lithuania that they were transported to Latvia and Austria to murder the rest of the Jews.

People were running to Russia that first day. A lot of them were afraid because the streets were bombed. And we didn't know some of us were staying home. The ones that didn't look quite Jewish-- it's a question how they look quite Jewish-- were going out in the streets to find out what is happening. And we realized that, of course, the Lithuanians were standing with flowers and welcoming the Nazis that saved them all-- saved them from the Russians that already, as I said before, were a whole year in Lithuania.

And the nightmare started after this. There were a lot of killings and shootings. People that were running, most of them never made it. And coming back-- they were running to Russia, which was about, I would say, oh, I don't know how many miles. Because I was one of them, unfortunately, that never ran because I was three months married. And my mother-in-law was afraid to let me go because during the First World War, which was 1914, people were lost and separated from their families. So the whole family decided to stay and wait what will happen.

After that, a month later, when all the killings stopped, meaning from home to home or on the roads, people that were running and never made it and were coming back, we had lists pasted on the doors. And it said that all the Jews have to move in in the ghettos.

A ghetto was not like a ghetto you call here. They went to a very Jewish neighborhood, which in Kovno was Slobodka. They had beautiful big yeshivas there. That night was like you heard in Germany the Crystal Night. They went from home to home. They cut their throats and the breasts and the noses, mostly of the women and of all our rabbis, our beautiful rabbis.

It was the bloodiest night in history in Kovno so that they cleared the homes for us Jews to move in. It took a while. So

they had to make the barbed wires and all the machine guns. And then they posted signs all over that all the Jews that remained alive in Kovno, as I say, which was the capital at that time of Lithuania, to move in the ghetto.

And as usual, they ended every order, any Jew that will remain alive in-- that will remain in Kovno outside the ghetto, his whole family and the whole block, meaning all the Lithuanians, will be killed. Naturally, we all moved to the ghettos. They assigned us homes, partitions.

It was like a casket. They gave you, like, six-- whatever the measurements were. Like in one room, we were three families. We hung curtains. And this was more or less life in ghetto. I'm trying to make it all very fast. I don't know how much time you have.

We have a full hour. Don't rush. You get as much to tell as you feel like it.

You know, it's so hard to talk because there are so many. I'm just dropping out so many things. I'm doing it so because sometimes I can't talk. I choke down.

That happens too. Don't worry about it.

I needed to say something about the Russians, but somehow I don't want to go back.

You can go back.

I told you that before the Nazis came in, the Russians came in. I was the second in our family. I had beautiful parents and a sister and a brother. Can't talk. OK.

The communists took over our city. I'm going back now, just before about, let's say, six months after they marched in. They put in their military bases in Lithuania, supposedly to help us, save us from the Nazis.

After a while, our president ran away. Matter of fact, he came here to America and died in Cleveland. And little by little, Russia took over. And we found ourselves in a communist country.

As I said before, my parents were religious. My father was an Orthodox rabbi. We were also well-to-do people. That was a crime, naturally, in the eyes of the Russians. They threw us out from our home.

My sister and I were in college, so they could not find us at the time being. The Russians, when they marched in, they gave Vilna a present to Lithuania because years ago, we studied in the history, it used to be the capital of Lithuania. Poland has taken it away.

So the university was moved to Vilna. And my sister and I were moved there. In the meantime, just two weeks before the Nazis came in, the communists took all the ex-bourgeois, which included my family, put them in cattle trains and deported them to Siberia.

My sister and I were forgotten. My brother was deported with my parents. My parents, from the train, sent a letter that I should go back home and collect their belongings because what's going to happen to us since the Russians persecute us as children of bourgeois. I didn't want to go back home because I said I hate Kovno because my parents are no longer there. But my sister insisted that I have to go, since I was already three months married. And I have a different name. And they no longer will know who I am.

I went back, as I said before. It all happened so fast. I went back Friday noon in just my one dress. And my sister stayed there because she, of course, was also now an enemy. They called us enemies of the country, enemies of Russia. My husband, who studied to be an engineer, was going to follow me back on Sunday.

That same night, I'm going back. The Russians, of course-- the Nazis-- the bombs started flying. And the next morning, there were no longer Russians. The whole Russian Army retreated. And I was cut off from my sister and my husband.

And I remained with my mother-in-law, who was worried that, if I leave and run with the rest, I will be lost and then her son will be mad her that she lost me.

So I remained now here. And naturally, as I said, I went to the Kovno ghetto. My sister was killed. We lived in a section in Vilna that also became the ghetto, like in Kovno. They had a ghetto there. And they did the same as they did in Kovno. Only in Vilna, instead of just cutting everybody's throats, they loaded them in trucks and took them to a-- I think it was Ponary, if I recall correctly from the stories I was told. And they just gassed everybody there.

When did you find out about you sister?

I found out already. Bad news travels very fast. While I was in ghetto, somehow there were always people that were telling stories, new, because the Lithuanians were so delighted to tell us all the bad things, that they carried the stories. And I knew a few months later what happened to her.

I guess I always-- I-- really, it's very hard for me to talk about my sister because we were very, very close. She was only one year older. And I always feel, if-- I found out, really, more about it after I was freed because one of our friends that we were a group that kept together when we were in Vilna in the university. And all of our friends ran, and most of them remained alive. They were in Russia, and they are now in Israel.

And I-- one of our friends told me that he pleaded with her, that she should run with him. And she said, no. I sent Sonia, which is me, of course, to Kovno, and she has to wait there until I come back. For many, many years, I always felt-- [CRYING] I can't.

For many years, I felt that the only reason she's really dead is because she waited for me. If she would have run, she would have been today alive.

OK. I'm going back now to our life in ghetto. I think there were many stories about it. We lived three years in the ghettos, between our murderers, the Lithuanians. They really did most of the killings. The Germans were just there to supervise them.

Every few months they would announce-- they would come to the ghetto. They picked one of our finest Jews in town to be the head of our ghetto. And every few months-- I think in the beginning they put announcements to turn in all our money. Afterwards, they took all our radios, TVs. They told us-- they allowed us to live 100 days. And it was always, of course, that threat that, if we will come in in your home and find anything more, you and your whole family and your whole street will be killed.

Naturally, none of us wanted to risk the lives of our friends. So we turned in our money, then our gold. Most of the women-- we were very young. I was 19. Most of the women took out the gold from their teeth that they had because they were so horrified.

I had a mother-in-law. She was so horrified that she found, two days later, a gold crown, and she sent me to, as we called it, the brown house. It was our headquarters for some of our, who I said, our head of our Jews, and including we had a group of people that formed a-- it's like a Senate. It was the-- we called it the brown house.

There the Nazis didn't bother anymore posting notices. They just posted it on this particular house. And from there, we read and we heard. We learned all the things that they wanted us to do.

After a month, I guess we were cleaned out of our monies, our jewelry, everything we had. And then they started taking us to work. Every morning we had to report to the gates. Of course, it was barbed wires all around. We also had a law-- if any time we pass the gate and we see a German, we had to bow. The men had to lift their hats. We had to bow.

If you didn't bow, you were just shot with a machine gun on site. It was very, very-- it was a pride, I guess, to shot a Jew. And that reminds me of a little incident. Before we came back, before we came into the ghettos, I looked very much like a Lithuanian type, if there is such a thing as type. But anyway, I used to walk without signs, without the

yellow stars, trying to bring to the rest of the family bread and cigarettes because there were always lines for it.

And when the announcement came out that the Jews have to wear a yellow star, I crochet it during the night, a star, and I put it on on my left side. And we had to walk in the gutter. And I was walking in the dark in the gutter, and a car of Nazis stopped right in front of me. And he called over, come on over.

And he pointed at my star. And he said, why are you wearing it? And I said, because I'm a Jew. He said, you are a dirty, rotten, poor-- excuse me for it, but that's exactly what he called me. He said, you must have a Jewish lover, and that's why you're wearing it. You're sympathizing with them.

And I said, no. I'm sorry. I'm a Jew. My father was a Jew. My grandparents were Jews. Matter of fact, they were all rabbis. And he said, you're a dirty liar. I don't believe you. And he took out his gun, and he pointed at me. And he said, you deserve to die because you sympathize with the Jews. And he clicked it.

And I don't know what happened. Maybe it was God's wish for me to live. Then he said, why should I waste a bullet on you. That's too expensive. Go and rot with the rest of the Jews. And he just let me go.

Anyway-- so I jump back. After-- now we are back in the ghettos. I'm back there. And after they stopped with all the killings and-- Nazis just could walk in. We could not walk out, but they could walk in any time and just roam the homes, looking for goodies or for anything. And if they felt like shooting, they shot. There was no crime. It was, I guess, at that time, something very important to shoot a Jew.

And most of the Lithuanians, before we never knew that they are such murderers and that they hated us so much until we learned it in the concentration camps. And maybe just once I found that in university, but I'm not going to go back to it.

We started going to the gates. That's where we had to assemble every morning to go to work. And from there, trucks would arrive with Germans, and they would say they need women to scrub floors, they need some women to wash German barracks. The hardest and worst part was going to work on the airports because we had to-- we had to fill bags of rocks. And we were building the airports.

We were terrific helpers, workers, for free naturally. And there were always machine guns around us. And we worked with soldiers surrounded by machine guns. And naturally, nobody wanted to go work at the airport because it was cold. They never gave us any food. So we tried to get better jobs. Unfortunately, there were a lot of pushing at the-- as soon as they said that they need five or 10 women to work, to clean barracks, everybody pushed. And again, there were a lot of shootings and killings.

And then there was the nightmare of coming back at night from work. Sometimes, if you worked in the city, the Lithuanians who were very poor and didn't have much, needed some clothing, and some of the Jews had clothes. So you traded a dress for a piece of bread and butter, which was beautiful. But when you came to the gate, there was a long line. And you were not allowed to bring anything inside. And they searched us.

And if they only suspected that they had-- that we had something, they killed us. It was absolutely a nightmare. Of course, that was the biggest nightmare. Matter of fact, just like you-- I don't know if you ever heard of this song, [NON-ENGLISH]. We had a song, [NON-ENGLISH]. It is a beautiful song for us.

The nightmare of passing through the inspection carrying a piece of bread that you gave maybe a gold ring or a valuable dress or a heavy coat, but while there is life, people have to eat. And people had wives and children at home. And so they had to bring some food.

After a few months, they started-- I guess they realized there were too many Jews in the ghetto left alive. So they started what we call it the aktions. They separated. They brought us all out in a field. They didn't bring us out. I mean, there was an announcement that tomorrow morning we want to know how many people there are still available for work. Please, everybody gather on a-- there was a field, an empty spot, an empty space. And they said anybody that will remain in the

homes, even if you are sick with a high fever, please come out. You will be shot on sight.

Naturally, the people were all coming out and came out on the fields. And if somebody was sick, they were carried on stretchers. Nobody remained at home. And we realized right-- after a while what was happening. The Nazis, of course with the black garbs, were there with the Lithuanians with the machine guns. And right away, with a stick they made us all line up and march.

They enjoyed separating families. If there was a big family of four or five, one was always pointed to the left and one to the right. The children were always pointed-- the children and the older people were pointed to the left. And if you were 40, you were old. If you had one gray hair, you were old. And they were pointed to the left side, the rest to the right.

And it didn't take-- after a few minutes, you all knew which one was the bad side because, naturally, were the guards with the long whips, leather whips, were hitting the people. Those were-- this was the bad side.

Families did not want to be separated. And they begged and screamed. And if somebody saw that a child or a husband was on one side, they wanted to run. But this was their pleasure, to watch us scream and beg and plead. They never let you go where you wanted.

If you wanted to be the whole family, they didn't let you. If you were young, they said, no, we could use. You could still work. You can't go there.

I do not really believe that one person by his own choice wanted to be separated. Unfortunately, they separated a lot of the young people from their parents, to go to the right side. We also tried to make our parents-- my parents were not with me. I think I told you they were in Siberia. But the ones who had parents, and I, that was with my mother-in-law, as soon as we realized what was happening, we held them tight and we made them march real fast so they would look younger and strong. And so this was how the day ended.

I would say a half of us remained on the left lane. And that same night, we could hear all the machine guns. What they made them do-- and this, I guess you must have heard it before. They had to dig their own grave. And then they had to take off their clothes because the Germans needed our clothes. And with machine guns they were shot. And the way that they fell in the graves right away, and all they had to do is cover the graves.

The next morning, they took away half of our section. Because now that we were smaller, we couldn't get more space, but they kept taking away part of our ghetto because our dear Lithuanians needed it. I called them "dear Lithuanians" because we hate them. They did most of the killings. And they turned out to be-- we knew that the Poles always killed Jews, but the Lithuanians even turned out worse than the Poles.

They were very cruel to us. And of course, their slogan was that all the Jews are communists. Somehow, we were always on the wrong side. First when the communists came, we were all bourgeois. When the Nazis came, naturally the Lithuanians-- a Jew was-- you didn't have to be anything better than a Jew. That was bad. But also the Lithuanians added another bad thing to us, that we were communists.

This went on for three years-- I'm going to make it short-- until during the three years, suddenly also what was always-- since I was left without a family and alone, the Nazis, when they needed some people for work, the first they would come to the brown house and ask for people. And the young people or the ones that were alone were always the first on the line, the first ones to be killed.

In a half a day, where they came to us once and demanded 531 brilliant, intelligent people between 18 to 25 years old for a special good job. Instead of-- they asked for 500, but our elders gave them 531 because everybody wanted to be the chosen ones. They were killed the same day. Their boots were taken back to the ghetto.

They did not want intelligentsia. They only wanted hard workers. After a while we realized that. And so after this one time, whenever they asked for special workers, they didn't get any. They had to catch us because we were hiding, we were running. We did everything to try not to go.

During those three years, they took some people to Latvia, Estland and Latvia. And really, some of them were taken to different camps. But they had to catch all of us. Nobody anymore volunteered for work because you never knew if you're going to be shot right away, if you're going to be taken anywhere. We also could always see, right around the ghetto was a big fortress. And that's where they did the killings.

And then after they did the killings, since they did not have gas chambers in Lithuania, they took a group of people that they fed them very well. And they would stack up the bodies and on top of the bodies wood, and they burned them. And we could smell the burned flesh. And we could see the fire.

We had about three aktions like this. And we called an aktion what I said before, what they would tell us to come out all on the field. And they would, with a stick, point one to the left, one to the right. Somehow by accident I always turned out in the right side, not because I really fought for my life.

I went through the ghetto, I guess, very monotonous because I never believed that my parents are alive. I knew-- they told us that they bombed the trains that were going to Russia. I also, right away, heard the news about my husband. I was three months married. When he realized that I am not coming to Vilna, he left by foot to pick me up from Kovno. And like all the others that were running and never made it, they were caught on the road back and put in a labor camp that used to be a camp for hard prisoners, for murderers. This is where the Jews were put.

Most of them were young kids. The girls were let go. They just kept the boys. When I say kids, it was 20, 21, 22, those ages. Up to 25, I would say. They worked hard labor. And after a few weeks, they let half of them go. And this is the first time that I received word about my husband, that he is in this camp. I'm trying to-- I think the name of the camp was [NON-ENGLISH].

I saw some of my friends that I recognized from the university. And they told me, don't worry. They had a little extra work. They were, I think, working in fields, drying out some ditches. And in two weeks your husband will be back home. Two weeks, where they were supposed to be home, we got the nightmarish news that they just killed everybody with machine guns because, supposedly-- there was no because really.

They didn't need a because. But the story was that they found some buried Lithuanians, some killed Lithuanians, that the communists killed them or whoever killed them. And naturally, if there was a dead bodies, then the Jews were guilty. So all the rest of the Jewish boys that were in this camp were murdered that same day.

Your husband?

My husband was one of them, yes. There were no witnesses. There wasn't one survivor in this whole camp. That was, I would say, a month or two or maybe three, when we were in-- when we first came in into the ghetto. Those were the first killed, even before the 531 that I told you.

After that we were-- after the three years in the ghetto, suddenly we heard a rumor that children are being killed. This was the big monstrosity. I think they're all going. We have to go, don't we?

[INAUDIBLE]

Anyway, we heard that children are being killed. Before-- yes, a little while before that, they started telling us that the ghettos will be liquidated-- I guess the Russians were coming close-- and that they are going to evacuate us all to Germany. But before that they, they said that the ghettos will be liquidated. I mean, they will be burned and there will be no more-- they don't want any ghettos. And all we will have is camps, but we will have the camps in Lithuania.

So they started out with two camps. One was-- there was a suburb of Kovno. It was called [PLACE NAME]. And one was the [PLACE NAME]. A lot of our Jewish people came from there. And so this was already different. We no longer had homes. They built tents, like barracks for workers. And we had three-- we called them [NON-ENGLISH]. I really don't know how you would call it in English.

There were three layers. You slept-- they made stairs. And we still were volunteers. We were allowed to sign up for those camps ourselves. There were people who didn't believe in it and stayed in the ghetto. Some of us, including me, because I was always on the first fire, some of my friends said that it would be much better off if we go to those camps because we will be less in danger than remaining in the ghetto, which will be liquidated in the end.

Most of the people that remained in the ghettos were the Jewish police. Naturally, we right away they had the Jewish police and Jewish firemen. And their wives and families were maybe a little more secure, or thought they were more secure than we.

We Lived in the barracks. Of course, there was no more privacy. Women were in one tent and men in another. And then they had a tent for women and children. And there was maybe one or two-- it wasn't a tent. Excuse me. They were barracks.

Barracks.

There were one or two or three mothers took care of most of their children because they had to go to work. There were always-- we knew exactly what was going on in the ghetto. And they knew what was going on with us because we kept - there were always people that were going in the outside.

A lot of people used to take off their-- we had-- we did not even have a tattoo or anything. All we wore is the yellow stars. If you took off a yellow star, you could go on the street. And naturally, you had to sneak out that the guards didn't see you. But they were all for sale. Not all, but people knew who was for sale.

And sometimes it was easier to sneak out from a work place if you worked for Germans. Meaning if there were German soldiers, and if you clean their barracks, there was only one guard. And most of the time, that was his day off. So he went to sleep, and the women who cleaned the barracks could sneak out and go out in the street and see what's happening, if there is any news, what goes on in the outside world because, naturally, we didn't have any radios. We--

[AUDIO OUT]

OK. In a way, I guess sometimes you have a little luck. I was lucky. I didn't have any clothes because I came to Kovno, as I told you, a day before the Nazis marched in to pick up belongings to my parents. So I was lucky that I landed to work in one of those while I was already in that camp. We called it [NON-ENGLISH] lager. That was the in-between between the ghetto and the real concentration camps.

As soon-- we all came-- we signed up voluntarily. The next day, we had to-- the ones that worked close to the camp automatically had to go back. The ones that did not work in those camps-- we all had to work. You had no right to live in the ghetto without working. We had a lot of children in the ghettos, so they opened even schools there.

And we had workshops in the ghettos, making clothes for the German army and all kinds. I really am not quite sure what kind of work they did in those barracks because most of us younger people had to go every morning to the gates. And we had to go and work outside. And if you didn't go, they caught you and no work, no food.

I forgot to tell you about our foods. Naturally, we were left without money. So we didn't have anything to buy food with. Also, our food was very poorly. We would get bread. A lot of people stuck up with food because we had about a month until we got in into ghetto.

If you didn't have any money or you didn't have any clothes to trade, you couldn't get too much food. My mother-in-law and I were one of the few that couldn't get too much food because she lived alone. And since I came back from school, I didn't have anything. I wore her clothes. And I looked very ridiculous, but who cared how you looked.

And so we-- I was lucky that I happened to work because I spoke German. A lot of our kids in Lithuania spoke German. And maybe I spoke a little better German because, when I was young, I was raised by a German governess.

So I worked as a cleaning woman for Germans. And even though it was not easy because I never in my life before did any housework, but when you are hungry and when you are cold, it is delighted-- delightful that you can at least do this kind of work. And matter of fact-- this is a little humor-- the first time they brought me and I peeled potatoes, I cut my finger.

And some of the German army soldiers were not really bad. This was the Wehrmacht, not the Nazis. The Wehrmacht were the green uniforms. The Nazis were the black uniforms. And we always watched out for those uniforms. The green ones were not really bad. They were just not-- a lot of them were just soldiers that were caught in a war that they didn't plan.

And so the cook noticed that I cut my finger. And he said, I don't think you ever peeled potatoes before. And I got very frightened. And he said, don't worry. You're not going to lose your job. He said, matter of fact, I can use a few women every day. And I will tell you right away that also, whenever they took a group of people to work, we always had right away a Kolonnenführer, which meant a head of the group. They called him ein Kolonnenführer, which was a head of a group.

So this group particular, they needed men like shoemakers and tailors and the ones that work with irons. What do you call them?

Blacksmiths.

Blacksmiths, right-- all kinds of specialists, those were the men. But how we got in that bus because, I told you, when you knew that there was a bus picking up people for work, the women pushed. That's maybe one of the reasons we push now in the buses because they knew it would be a job somewhere under a roof. And none of us wanted to go to the airport.

And this is-- I had a friend that was a policeman, and he pushed me into this bus. And when we realized that they only needed workers, and we found ourselves, five women, we were horrified. And the men said, what are we going to do with you? What are we going to do? What are we going to do with you girls? What are we going to tell the Germans when they see you?

But as soon as the bus arrived wherever we had to be and the cook saw us through the window, he said, great. Women, they'll peel potatoes-- because they had an army coming back at night, and they had to feed them. And so as I said before, I cut my finger. And I was very frightened because I knew that he would know that I really don't know how to do it. And he said, don't worry. You speak well enough German, and I could use you also as an interpreter.

And you're going to stay here. And I'm going to go down right now to the leader and tell him that I can use every day five women and that he should bring you back and four more. And so, as I said, it was my luck.

Unfortunately, there were also a lot of, we called it vitamin P-- protection. That was-- protection would also be the wrong word. But I said before, we had a brown house. That meant a house with some people who got softer jobs, like it happens in every nightmare in a jail, and this was also in the ghettos. And those people naturally had wives and cousins and sister in-laws. And so if there was a better job, it was always taken by those people.

I, who came from a very beautiful family, but my family was right away lost, didn't have any. And we called it vitamin P. We had-- the ghetto had his own dictionary. We had a lot of other words. Like, for example, a Nazi was a ya'aleh-ya'aleh. This is a Hebrew word that means up. Ya'aleh, that means going up, rise. That was a Nazi.

You couldn't say a Nazi, so when you said ya'aleh, naturally everybody knew that you had to watch out. Vitamin P, as I said, was a very, very important word. That means you knew somebody important in the right place. They also had people that worked for the Gestapo. Those people didn't have it so bad because the Germans used to call "my Jews," "mine Juden." And so, again, they sometimes got jobs inside the Gestapo. Not that it was inside, it was probably peeling potatoes or cleaning toilets.



Those were our jobs. But it was beautiful because we kept warm. And sometimes after they ate and when there was food left over, we even got plates of soup. And we would bring it down. And this was also my job.

After we got through peeling potatoes, I had the luxury of washing the floor of the kitchen. That was a very important job because when I got through washing the kitchen, I was handed a bowl of soup. And I brought it down in the kitchen. And the five of us ate it. Every ate the soup.

And the next day, when he realized, the cook, that I shared my soup, he gave me, instead of a plate, he gave me a big canister of soup. And we ate all the soup. And after a while, they gave us to wash their dirty clothes.

It was a pail of clothes, which was underwear and a shirt and socks. And some of them that were nice, with the pail of clothes would leave a piece of rotten bread. It was beautiful because we were always hungry-- or even sometime a piece of bacon or even a few cigarettes. Naturally, most of us, practically 99%, smoked because, I guess, with the fear and listening when they marched in-- for every killed German, hundreds of Jews will be killed. We didn't have anything else, so we puffed cigarettes. And if we didn't know how to smoke, we learned.

So this was the soft jobs. And we did it now, some of us, for three years, some of us for two years, until the day, again, where-- I jump back and forth-- where they killed all the children. We heard about it. It started in a camp before us. And people started hiding their children. Of course, in our camp, there was no place where to hide.

And I had an accident. A week before they started killing the children, we were climbing on a truck to be taken to work. And my foot slipped, and I-- I am a klutz anyway. So I hurt my foot. And then two days later, I was shivering. And I told my girlfriend, something is wrong. And we had-- our hospital was just another barrack, and I walked in there. And it seemed that I was running a very high fever.

And I got an infection in my foot. And they couldn't send me back to the ghetto where we still had--

Your leg.

My leg-- thank you honey-- where they had hospitals. So the doctor kept me. And after three days, he-- our doctors in our hospital were like, I think, a country doctor and a gynecologist. I don't remember who the third one was. Definitely we didn't have any surgeons. But our country doctor, even though I was very feverish, I heard him say either we cut her or we lose her. And so he came over to me. And he said, I'm going to operate.

And I said, are you going to give the anesthetic? And he said, yes. And the nurse put a mask on my face. But naturally, they didn't have anything. And she told me to cut, and I was screaming like a pig. But he cut my leg. And I called him, I think, every name that I could think of, a dirty name. But he saved my life because as soon as the pus came out, my fever came down. And he came over, I remember distinctly a few hours later, and asked me, do you still hate me? And I apologized because I really was rude, and I screamed a lot.

And so the day-- and so now I had a bad leg. And I healed very bad, so I was in this barrack the day that they took all the children. And it was a nightmare.

In the ghetto it took a long time. In our [NON-ENGLISH] lager, where I was, it just took one little hour. They came-- I think a week before one of the head murderers came and counted the children because he said the children don't get enough milk, and he would like to bring a cow for us and even maybe make some sandboxes so the children could play. And naturally, they came with a truck. And it took maybe half hour, and all the children were in the truck.

And the only children that were left were, I would think, maybe three or four. In the hospital they were sick, and they did not want sick children. And a few in the barracks were-- the mothers that were taking care, I guess, hid them. There were no places where to hide. I understand some were hung in a bag on a wall or whatever. But we had about five or seven children left in the whole camp.

And those-- that night, of course, was a nightmare, when the people came from work and none of the children were home. It was the biggest Yom Kippur that anybody could hear. And then the Nazis came in and started screaming that there were screams and cries and they do not-- they cannot take it, and they don't want to hear it. So people have to stop crying because, if not, there will be shooting.

We always were threatened with shooting and machine guns. And unfortunately, there are always other people who say, don't cry. I don't want him to come and kill me. And we had some young people, and some of them fight for life. You know, nobody really-- some became so that they said, I don't really care. My child is dead, I want to be dead. And I want to be shot. But those were the people that they didn't want to shoot.

They took-- we had one of the girls, and she's still alive, she lives in my hometown. And she was one of the girls that was in the barrack. Well, a two-year-old child was taken from her, her two-year-old son. And when she said, you can't take my son. [INAUDIBLE] They wouldn't-- they said a bullet is too expensive for you. They took her child, but they wouldn't kill her because she was young and strong and she could work.

So this was the first aktion in our camp. A week later, of course, they came and picked up the other children. They knew exactly from our guards, even though the children were told don't laugh and they were always hidden in beds, and our children knew. And again, I was still in the barrack when this, when the guard dragged a seven-year-old little girl, and she was screaming. And she said, I can wash floors. And I can scrub. I can-- I can wash clothes and scrub floors. Please, don't kill me.

The children knew they were being killed because their mothers told them, don't scream, don't cry, don't do this. Don't let anybody see you. They cleaned us out. There was no child left in our camp. It was much worse in the ghettos because people started building bunkers in their homes. And unfortunately, the motto was, if you want your child in one of those bunkers, you have to-- you have to promise that if the child will scream, you will have to choke your child or give him poison because every one of those holes were hiding a lot of people. And with a child's screams, the Nazis will know where they are.

I was not there. This is what my friends told me because, even though we were already in a camp and the rest remained in the ghetto, we were allowed once in a while to visit the ghetto, if you ask permission. Again, we had a head in our camp. And maybe while I was in this [NON-ENGLISH] lager, which was, I would say, nine months, until they took us all to the concentration camps, they allowed-- I was, I think, once or maybe twice they allowed me to take a trip back to the camp to visit my mother-in-law or whoever was left there that I still knew for an hour.

We walked on the street, of course, with guards, like prisoners. And then we came back to the ghettos. Then suddenly we heard, again-- we heard bombs flying. We were always lucky-- very glad when we heard shooting. We knew that there is still a war going on. We heard all the shootings, and we knew something is bad. And we were told that we are going to be transported to Germany. That's when they took us to the real concentration camps. Those were, as I said before, barracks.

Actual shootings they never did in our barracks. They always-- when people disappeared, we never knew what happened to them. They took out people, but the actual killings-- in the ghetto they just shot. But after this, they always took you with a truck. And what happened, where they did the killings, we did not see it. We just always had witnesses, just like on the burnings on the ninth fort, where one girl, I think, escaped, where they did the burning after they killed the people on the fortresses.

But in the ghetto or in our camp, there were no killings. People just disappeared. And then we knew we will never see them again.

And then the day came where they told us that they are taking us to the camps. And in every horror, there's also songs were born. I like to sing and dance, so I used to be the entertainer. We had this song, [NON-ENGLISH]. That means, "corpses be strong." Because they would line us up in the morning, they would tell us take a bag of clothes. We still-- some people still had their clothes, even though we were in those barracks. They didn't allow us suitcases, but we were allowed our pictures. And some people had still their jewels, even though we were supposed to turn it in. But a lot of

people take chances.

Some people had clothes. We were allowed to take a bundle of clothes, a backpack. So now they told us again, take a very light pack, your best belongings that you have, and line up because you're going to be transported to Germany. And so for two days that's what's happening.

We would line up in the morning, and we would sing and make-- try to keep alive, keep our spirits up. And then at night, they would tell us to go back to the barracks. They did not have any trains. The trains were taken by soldiers until the second day. The second day, the trains finally were available.

And that's where we found each other again with the people from the ghettos. At that time, they were burning and tearing up all the ghettos because they realized that the people in the ghettos were hiding in bunkers. And they also picked up all our Jewish police.

They also realized that a lot of the Jewish police were making deals with the guards at the door to hide and take our children. So they gathered them all, and they killed every one of them. And I think, with one or two Jewish policemen, they went through the ghettos and they tore up all-- they tore up all the hiding places. There were dogs, and I don't think they missed one.

Some of them, they just bombed. And some of them, they threw in trucks and brought to the trains. And so that all the Lithuanians, we wound up in the same trains, people from our camp and people from the ghetto. And the ghetto where we were is, today, as flat as this carpet. There are no homes left, nothing. It was completely torn up. I think they did it for two or three days, and then they just wiped out. And that was when we were taken to the camps.

Naturally, we all thought that they are taking us straight to the gas chambers, but they did not. We arrived to Stutthof, Stutthof, which most people don't know. During our transport, a few people tried to jump from the windows. I don't know how they could do it because it was very hot. But I guess when people fight for life they do it.

I never fought for my life because I always felt that my whole family was killed. I really don't care what happens to me. I just, like a machine, went along for the ride. And a few jumped, but they never made it because they had guards on top of the wagons. And they killed everyone. And they put the dead people with us in the train. So naturally, now we were sure that they are taking us to the gas chambers because, why should they bother picking up the dead people?

And we arrived in Stutthof. And they told all the women and children, out. And the trains were locked up. And the men were taken away. We never knew what happened to the men. They came with trains, with small trains, like maybe buses or small, small, like transport buses. And also, while we were standing there crying and people in hysterics because their fathers, husbands, were taken further, they brought a group of children that walked around us. And they were pointing us, that those are Jews, murderers, whatever they called us.

We really didn't care that they were walking them around and around while we were standing. And while they were-- there was no pushing because we didn't care when our turn will be, until we got into one of those trains. And there were also a lot of crying because families found each other. There were two camps and the ghetto. We all, some of us that had some family left, found each other. And so they, at least together, were going to die.

But they brought us to those barracks. And we saw-- while they brought us that same night, before they let us in in a room to pass the night on the floors, we saw a group of women. We weren't sure if they were women or not. They were all with shaved, clean shaved. And they wore striped clothes. I'm sure you all saw what they looked like. And they were running past by us.

And they said, look. Take a good look because that's how you're going to look. We weren't even sure that if they had tongues or not because none of them talked. And we kept saying, say something, but they didn't. Because we wanted to see, I guess, if they have tongues.

That night we spent just in barracks. And the next morning, like we were used, they started a sorting-- women and

children on one side, and women without children. And the women and children, we never saw them again. Of course, they went to the gas chambers.

The rest of us, we spent three days-- it was a big floor. We spent on the floor. At night, we would line up, and they would give us a pail-- not really a pail-- a plate of soup. This was our meal for the day. And this went on, I would say, for two or three days.

Then they sent us to entlausung. Entlausung meant delice us. Naturally, all the Jews are full of lice and dirty. That's what the Germans called us. This was-- of course, we were all afraid of this because we already heard about the famous gas chambers. And we also knew that, when you get in in those rooms, you may get water or you may get gas. And we were all horrified and cried.

But of course, it did not do any good. We were lined up. And the German soldiers were staying. And we were all crying because we were young and we were still very shy. And we had to take off our clothes and hand it, like you hand a coat. And they, of course, made fun about our figures and our looks. And we hand it over, and then we lined up. And they were spraying us with soap wherever you have hair.

They did not shave our group anymore because we were bringing-- we were coming in thousands. My number was 42,000-something. I don't remember. I don't have it. We were, again, the lucky ones, the younger group. They sprayed us with soap, and we actually got water instead of gas because here I am. I never was gassed.

The parts, the other parts, I'm sure did not get water. Those were the women with the children. They did not get them right away because they had too many. They kept them for two days without food and water, which was a nightmare because they had babies, and the babies were being nursed. And the mothers didn't have anything to drink. We got, in the evening, some soup.

They kept us for three weeks there. It was like a quarantine. And then after the three weeks, they told us they are going to send us to work, which all of us really wanted because we were afraid of Stutthof. As long as there were gas chambers, we were horrified. And fortunately, where there's life there's will. And people fight for life. Not that we fought, we didn't have anything to fight with. But you want to live.

So after the three weeks, they started lining us up. And each one got a bundle. The bundle supposedly-- of course, they were our clothes because, when we came out of the showers, they took away our glasses, even the pins from the hair. All we had is the striped clothes. But I assume they could not send us in those clothes to work. So we came out, and we had a package, which was a dress and supposedly a pair of panties-- bras, they didn't believe in it-- and shoes.

Naturally, most of us were barefooted because how can they fit a size eight shoe in a three or four. So we were barefooted. We exchanged dresses so that we could fit in in whatever they gave us. And we were shipped by boat somewhere.

Our first place was in a nice-- it was a place where there was farming. And we dug. And this is what our life was the nine months in camp. We dug trenches for German soldiers.

Our camp, we were about 1,200 people in our camp. They made one of our older women, again, a camp leader. We had about 19 guards with machine guns around us. This was our camp for the nine months until we were freed.

We changed three different camps. We lived in tents, like scouts. We carried our homes. They would bring us in the field. We would put up the camps. At night we slept there. In the morning, the whistle would blow. In five minutes you had to be outside, 10 women in a camp. We were lined up.

If you were late, you were spanked. You were not spanked very simply. You had-- you had to bend down and lift your dress, and you got 25 lickings in your behind with a leather whip. It was hurting a lot. We used to make fun of ourselves, who has a nicer map on her behind?

Our only privacy we had were the toilets. As soon as we arrived in the camp, we dug a big hole and we put four poles. That was our toilet. But the one place the guards did not go in is in this place. It smelled awful, but it was our paradise because we could actually talk without a guard standing behind us. And if one girl, by accident-- in those places that we dug the trenches, there were Polish workers. If they gave somebody a rolled cigarette, of course, everybody took a puff in the toilet.

That was as, I said, the only place that we had privacy and where people passed on what happened. Somebody said, there's still a war going on. They talk about America has joined the war because none of us knew what was going on.

We felt that the world has forgotten us and that nobody-- Stutthof happened to be in a beautiful place. It is somewhere in between Germany and Poland. I think I found it on the map. It was-- there were trees around. The air was beautiful. That probably was not far from water.

And matter of fact, my leg that I had injured-- and I forgot to say that I was walking with a stick. Somebody made a stick. And I was sure that they will kill me because now I had the bad foot. During the first night, a skin grew on it so that it wasn't wet, and I could actually walk normal without a cane. I threw away my cane because I was afraid to walk with a cane.

But the air was beautiful. And the camps-- we had, of course, barbed wire, electric barbed wires. But it was so inside that we knew nobody would ever find us. And we felt that the world has forgotten us. Except those camps that we dug trenches, we were between Germans. But we were the forgotten people, prisoners. People just didn't pay attention to us.

And I guess, by that time Germany was losing the war because it was in '44. And most of the Germans were afraid of their own skin, so they didn't bother with some prisoners that are led by machine guns-- they didn't carry machine guns. Some, I guess, were machine guns that you carry.

We were 1,200 women and 15 or 16 guards. And that was plenty. None of us were going to kill them or fight back. And of course, we were always less and less. We also had in our camp three times a day would-- on Sunday was a special day. In the morning, they would give us a pail of coffee. And mostly we washed our hands and faces in it. And at night, when we came home from work, they would give us our food, which was a German loaf of bread. It's a small-- I don't know what you would call the size of it. It just was like about two slices per person-- and a pail of soup.

And the soup was really whatever-- the potato peels swimming inside. If there was any meat sent to us, the German soldiers took care of it and maybe some of the people that worked in the kitchen. They were also hungry. That was our ration for the day.

On Sunday, sometime, if we were lucky, we were supposed to get something special. Maybe the Red Cross sent some food for us. I don't know. But we never knew for sure what will be, if we will get a treat or a horror because also, a few Sundays that, again, were separations, where they told us to line up. And instead of getting extra food, they would point one to the right and one to the left.

And the people who looked a little worn out or weak went to the left side, and they were sent back to the concentration camps. I don't think they gassed them anymore. They were just dying of typhus. Typhus was going around all over. Because I did run into some people that were sent. They remained alive. They left them there to die off.

Maybe they were afraid to kill in the end. I really don't know. But they stopped gassing the last few months in our camp. And so we just went on in this camp working. On Sunday, if we were lucky and they gave us extra food, it was a little sliver of butter and jelly-- that was a big luxury-- and sometimes even a little teaspoon of sugar. This was our special, Sunday special, if it wasn't something worse.

And once in a while some of us would get a pail of water so that we could wash. Definitely, we all had lice. We were sleeping in tents on top of straw. They also brought a shipment of coats that each of us got a coat. And we stuffed the straw inside our chest. We looked all like hunchbacks. We stuffed straw in the back and straw in the chest to keep us warm.

We had-- our main guard was one of the biggest murderers. He was a Polack and a German. And every morning when we lined up to go to the fields to dig the trenches, he used to say, it took me for 15 years I waited to do that. And so he would walk around with his leather whip and hit us over the legs.