

The interview of Seymour Moncarz--

Say it Moncarz.

--Moncarz on April 12, 1983 at the Holocaust Convention. Please, begin.

In Yiddish or English?

In English, please.

English. Was born in Czyzew. In 1939, when the war broke out, my town of Czyzew was completely bombed and burned. That's the day it starts there. It starts all the trouble, all the problems. A lot of people were killed. After that, the Germans came in. They took us for hard labor, to trains and whatnot. And they were all beating people to death.

That hard labor took about four weeks. But after that, when that was finished, people said that the darkness may come. And that will come. It took about four weeks after the labor, they called all the people-- young, women, children out to the street. It was 4 o'clock in the morning, raining.

And everybody came out-- men, women, and children. We didn't take too long. Some people ran away, was smart. But I was on the street with everybody. I didn't expect anything bad. I expected maybe hard labor, maybe camps. But it didn't take long.

The Gestapo came down from Lomza and they gave an order-- everybody-- sick, children, old, everybody and anybody to the street. At that time, they start to shoot people and kill people on the streets. And at that time, I don't know. I didn't know what to think. I saw something very bad is coming. But at that time, I have no choice. I couldn't run away.

But at that moment, when Gestapo came in, when they start the killing and beating and they start old men standing on the street march to the-- it was Szulborze. That was the village where they took everybody. Whoever couldn't walk, they load up the trucks. They load up trucks, military trucks-- all the sick, and children, and babies, and women who couldn't walk.

While they were loading them, they throwing them-- they were threw them like potatoes on the trucks-- sick women, sick children. The rabbi from Czyzew was a big man. He was paralyzed. About six of the Gestapo, with the help of the Polacks, the Polish police-- and the truck was filled up with children, and babies, and sick. They threw them up on the top of everybody. And the rabbi, which I can never forget-- the words of Shema Yisrael. [HEBREW]. And the truck went away.

At that time, at that moment, they left about 150 working people, which I was-- me my father was among them. We were among them. They put us up on the wall with the hands up. But then the leader from the Gestapo came over and said to the commissar-- I didn't know what their conversation was. But at that moment, they split up the group with 150 or so to about 30 people.

And within these 30 people, I was there with my father. So when they cleaned up the street with everybody, with the healthy, with the sick, with the women and children, we remained for the whole day. After the day was over, they took us in to the ghetto. Because it was a small neighborhood where the poor people were living in Czyzew, so they put us up in that ghetto.

And naturally, everybody, the 30-40 people were-- which we were the leftovers, everybody crying. And everybody lost their families and everything. But nobody could expect we saw very-- we saw what it goes on. We saw that dark clouds are coming.

But we stood overnight. And the next day, they took us out for labor, for work. So the Polacks came over and told us what happened over there. Over there, it was-- they took everybody to Szulborze. In Szulborze, they had-- how do you

say-- it was like channels for military, like--

Trenches?

Trenches, that's right. They took everybody to the trenches. And they took out 40-50 at a time, brought them over to the trenches. They had to take off their clothes completely naked and put them off to the trenches. And right behind them was Gestapo with their machine guns and kill them all. And everybody fell into the trenches. Naturally, some of them alive and some dead.

But everybody, when the trenches were filled up, a little bit dirt they covered it up. So in our town, it was about 2,400 people. So about 200 or 300 which they were on their way to different villages, or whatever, or whatnot, so in other word, about 90% from our town it was killed right away complete, while the war-- four weeks, while the war started, a couple of months after that labor ended.

Naturally, for me and my brother, it started a new era. We didn't know what to do. So we were working in the-- they made up little ghetto. We were all in the ghetto, but not for too long. Well, it would take a long time if I would tell the whole particulars. But anyway, we will--

Go ahead, tell the details. We would like to hear.

We were working about a couple of months in that ghetto-- hard labor, naturally. I was working as a cabinetmaker. I mean, that saved me on the street. The commissar, arms commissar, left some mechanics, like cabinetmakers, carpenters, shoemakers, tailors.

So me and my brother was among them because the arms commissar knew us. We worked for him as carpenters, wood cabinetmakers. So we survived for that. We worked for him, for the commissar, made different kind of furniture and whatnot. Because he had nothing over there.

After about six months, going down like this, beating, and killing, and worst what it goes on-- I mean, people know what-- farmers from the villages came over and said that next day, next morning, you all going to be killed. And something is going to happen to you people. So me, and my brother, and another few people, we heard a story like this.

So we are on the way to a-- wherever, we came to a farmer, which the other people, a few other of our friends, they knew a farmer. And we had with us some money, and gold, or whatever. We gave him away. And he gave us a place where to hide. What it did-- in his apartment, in the rooms over there, we made a big-- like a basement, like-- what do you call it?

Cellar?

Just a cellar, yeah, a big hole, and covered with the floor. And he gave us food, naturally, a little bit soup, a piece of bread over the day. We were living in the starvation, dirt, lice all over, without a bed, and without wash. In the small, little cellar, we were about 18 people.

We were living there for 21 weeks until March the 20th, that came March 20 of '43. And one morning, on a Saturday morning, the gendarmerie surrounded us because-- how would you say-- people gave them out, that they saw that they became rich all of a sudden. And people-- neighbors or Polish--

They spoke about them, they informed.

--and talked-- that's right. And they informed the Gestapo, the gendarmerie. And then one morning, they surrounded the whole house. He had another three boys beside us in another place. So they find the three boys. And right away, we were in the basement over here. We had one little brick, a hole for air. And right behind our dirt wall, the three boys were killed. They killed them, young boys, younger than me.

And then we heard in the basement, they hollered to that owner, Andrzej, to the Polack, give out. Because you have more people there. We know that you have more. When he heard that moment and saw the three that was killed, he tried to run away. And they killed him. In other words, he was killed before us.

We were laying in the basement like that is the end. Because he was killed, the three boys, they find. Now, the took him-- one of the gendarmerie knew Polish-- he spoke Polish. So he said to his daughter, to one of the daughters, daughter-- whatever her name was-- you better tell us the whole story of what goes on over here because we know that there's more Jews hidden over there. And you better tell us, otherwise, you're going to be killed.

At that moment, she took them into the room, right next to him, where we were under the floor. And she told them, over here is more Jews. She cried. In that moment, we saw that we are-- I mean, that's the end of us.

So right away, they said to us-- because the floor was all covered in good cover. They couldn't find even the opening. You better come out. Otherwise, you going to be destroyed through hand grenades. Naturally, we couldn't walk out at that moment. Everybody was-- who was first, or how, or what.

So they said-- another order came, we're going to count to three. If you don't come out, we're going to put some hand grenades in and blow you up. Well, naturally, we opened up the door. And we all came out with the hands above our heads. And we knew that that's the end.

But some miracle, two of the boys were with us-- Feivel and Eliahu Wisocki, their names was-- knew the commissar. And me and my brother knew the gendarmerie who were there because we worked for that commissar. And we made for them certain furniture, and teak furniture, and whatnot.

So they said to us, oh, my god, you are here? They knew us well. If they would know that we are here, they wouldn't even try to open it up. And they would go away. You understand? They wouldn't want to see us, really. But that happened.

So the main-- the master from the gendarmerie said, now, we have to take you to the arms commissar, the main military man over there. And whatever he's going to do, you are there in the hands. We had no choice, everybody crying and whatnot. They took two farmers with a horse and wagon and put us up, load us up with the military, with the machine guns, and everything, and they took us into the town, and put us in in a jail, in a small, little jail.

There, 18 of us-- we were 18 people. Me, my brother, with a family, and his wife, and children, and four more families. And in that jail, we knew it's moments of our life-- moments. So everybody said, we do-- we do-- before you die, you say certain prayers. And everybody [YIDDISH]-- how would you say? Everybody shook hands with each other and kissed each other.

And that took about from 10 o'clock-- it took from 6 o'clock in the morning. But when we came to that jail, it was about 9 o'clock. They were holding us until lunchtime, until about 12:00, 1 o'clock.

The commissar with the arms commissar, the military commissar, and the gendarmerie came out. They opened the doors. And the commissar said to me and my brother, hey, Tischler, [GERMAN]-- are you here among them? I said, yeah, Herr arms commissar? He called us out to the front. And he said, [GERMAN]? That is what-- you understand Yiddish?

No, I don't. But for posterity--

Why did you run away from us? Because we escaped at that time when the Bauer told us that we're going to be killed next day, which that happened. I said, arms commissar, we didn't run away from you. We went to that farmer, to that-- to work. He took us. He gave us work. We worked for him. And he gave us food. And that's it. But we want to work again.

He said to us, [GERMAN], which it means, you have to come back and work for us. I said, yes, Herr arms commissar.

So he took us out on the side, like over here. And one gendarme was holding us-- me and my brother. So and all the 16 other, all our families, my brothers' families, they took them away, at the same place to Szulborze, where all the Czyzew people were killed.

They put us in back to that cell, locked us up, and another man who was one of our friends, who was-- which was among them, he took about two hours. And he came back. We said to him-- his name was Meishel Zilberstein-- what happened? How did you come back? I mean, it's like coming from heaven, from the moon. He couldn't talk to us. He was very-- I mean, how would you say-- depressed.

Shocked? Shocked.

Shocked-- that's right, he was very much. Then he came to himself. And he told it the story that they took all the people-- again, the same thing, took all their clothes, put them near the graves, and kill them. How did you made it?

He said to them that I have some secret things to tell, which he was a little bit-- he was a smart boy. And he was-- true or not true, he had nothing to lose. So he said, I have some [YIDDISH]-- how would you say-- I have some-- like from hush, like something to tell you.

Military secrets?

What?

Military secrets?

Not-- I have some secrets.

So secrets.

Secrets, that's right. I have some good secrets to tell you, which it was actually nothing. They took him into the general area. And he told them that so-and-so Polack is-- was a-- and from the Endeks. And this Polack was-- so he start to tell them certain stories, which it wasn't true. But so long to say to-- to survive, to save his life.

At that time, we were together three of us in that small, little jail, like three corners. And that was on Saturday, March 20, 1943. We were there until Monday or Tuesday without food, without water, without nothing, like the dead.

Then on Tuesday, they came out from the gendarmerie and said, now, you have to go to work over there to the commissar. So they took us, all the three of us, to work. In the morning, they took us with a gun, a military-- a cop, a policeman. And he was watching us and going back to sleep.

It was going on like this for about two weeks without changing clothes. They gave us food, naturally, by the commissar over there, whatever it was left over for us. It was very good. It was like eating at Waldorf Astoria. It was going on for a little while for a couple of-- for about three, four weeks until from the arms commissar, one of them had his men. We had a nice talk with him.

He said to him that our life, to go on like this, taking us every morning to work and being in that jail, we are dirty, we are filthy, we are with lice, we have no clothes to change. He said, so what is your demand? I mean, what would you like?

We said, or you leave us loose, we'll go to work, we have no place to run, we have no place to go. Give us some clothes. Give us a place where to clean up. And we are willing to work and stay and work with you. He told us to be commissar.

And the commissar granted that. And they gave us a little room over there, not far. And they gave us clothes, which it was left over from the-- from all the Jewish people, from the-- they have a big magazine, which all the Germans took their clothes. So they gave us clothes. And they gave us room and board.

So we were there for a year, almost, until, again, the Gestapo came over and took us to Lomza, in prison. They took us to Lomza in prison. Again, over there, it started beating, and killing, and hunger, and dead every morning. They didn't open the door to give us any food, without beating us. Well, we suffered for a couple nights, couple of weeks.

Then they put us in in a carpenter shop over there, in Lomza. So we had a little better conditions until it was in 1944 already, and the Russian Army start to come a little closer. They evacuate all-- the whole prison, Lomza prison, to Germany-- Gross-Rosen concentration camp, Gross-Rosen. And me, and my brother, and the other, the third one, Zilberstein, was with us, the three of us. About 15 among 1,500 Polacks-- is it all right? It's not--

Oh, plenty of time. We have a whole other side.

When we came to concentration camp, naturally, they started-- I didn't know that it exists something like that. From my knowledge, the way I knew, wherever they find a Jew, they killed him-- anyplace, anywhere a Jew was find, it was no to bring him here or bring him there. Wherever they find him-- near the woods or near some place, he was killed immediately.

So to me, to my knowledge, the way I knew that there is no more Jews left in Poland. I didn't expect. I had no radio. I had no news. I mean, I didn't know from nothing what it goes on. But the way I saw it and the way our life was going, that-- I didn't expect any Jews leftover in Poland. We were the three of us.

But when we came to Gross-Rosen with the whole prison from Lomza, they put us in a P, the uniform from the concentration camps with a P, which it means a Polack. Because I know-- I knew, in the ghettos, we were-- you know how, Magen David, a David Star--

Oh, Magen David. --a yellow-- a yellow Magen David-- a yellow patch, a yellow patch with a Magen David. That's a Jew. I mean, that was a Jew. But over here, they put us on the P. So we thought, maybe they're going to keep us over here all support. Which we thought-- but they had the documents from the prison, which they didn't read right away, the first couple of days.

After two days, we were supposed to be transferred to a Arbeitslager, to a labor camp. They find out that we are Jews. They took us out, the three of us, separate and took us into the washroom, laundry room. And one of the kapos start to beat us up. I thought that was the end of us-- beating, and beating, and again beating.

And then he said, why not fight among you? And I mean, the three of us, I should hit my-- fight my brother, hit him-- he should hit me, or third person. So we did-- naturally, we lied. So he came over and he beat us up. That's the way you do it and that's the way you do it-- until I fell on the floor. So he put up some water on me and brought me back to life.

And again, I was in the barracks. And again, they took us-- they picked us-- they selected us to go to a labor camp. I mean, Gross-Rosen was just a transfer camp. They took us to a concentration camp, which the name was FÃ¼nfteichen, in Germany-- I mean, deeper in Germany. In FÃ¼nfteichen, we saw already a lot of Jews, which I didn't expect. Because the whole concentration-- the whole camp was all Jews over there.

And over there, I felt the smell from a concentration camp, from beating, from killing, from labor, hard labor. It was already close, like in the wintertime, with very thin clothes, with a pair of wooden shoes, which my feet was ripped up in pieces. They took us to work. Over there was factories, Krupp, to build ammunition. There was ammunition factories-- Krupp. And maybe you heard from Krupp's factories.

So they separate me from my brother. There used to be night shift and day shift. I used to work in the day shift, my brother worked night shift. I worked night shift, he worked in day shift. So hardly, every second Sunday, I saw my brother. Naturally, we talked it over. And we have to try our best to survive. Or maybe, we'll survive.

But the way it looked, it was impossible because the nourishment was very, very poor-- a piece of bread, a piece of bread for the whole day. You got away-- you went away to work 6 o'clock in the morning. You were woken up at 4

o'clock in the morning. And until-- between 4:00 and 6:00 was beating, and hitting, and giving out a piece of bread. And here, they stole from you that piece of bread. It was unbelievable to survive.

But anyway, I went to work somehow. I used to be a good worker over there. As a good mechanic, they used to give me bonuses for cigarettes, which I exchanged my cigarettes for a piece of bread. That helped me a lot. I didn't smoke. And when I saw my brother, I tried to save a piece of bread for Sunday, I should be able to give it to him.

Well, that's the way it was going on until December of '44. Until December of '44, it looks like the Russians came closer and closer. And they tried to evacuate us. So at that time, it start the march to walk, and walk, and walk for hundreds of miles with a piece of bread. Now, the third one, my friend, Zilberstein, he remained because he was sick. He couldn't walk no more. My brother was also very weak.

But somehow, we walked. We were holding each other. And we came to the destiny, again to Gross-Rosen, again-- the same concentration camp, which was the transfer camp. Over there, it was in the wintertime, like in January or December, January.

And was no place where to sleep or where to be. They put us up on the floors. In the camp was mud, wet, snow, rain. So we're walking. All the mud we taken in on the floor. At night, to sleep, they put us out like one into the other, one into the other, like herring. That's way we were supposed to sleep on the floor, without any clothes, without any covering.

We were there for about 10 days. Then they sent us to Buchenwald. In Buchenwald, were also the same thing-- hunger. They separate me over there with my brother. They put us up in lines. They sent me in another camp. They sent him in another camp. I was already by myself. And I thought, that's the end. I mean, I cannot survive no more. And I can't go-- I cannot go on any longer like that. I saw no end.

They said already, the Russians are coming closer and closer. And here, I see thousands and thousands are dying. They had over there, in Gross-Rosen-- they took the people working in the camp, in the muds, they couldn't take their feet out because they were weak. I was maybe about 60 or 70 pounds at that time. But people couldn't walk, so they remained and fell into the muds.

So a group of other-- from the concentration camp, they took in boats, in-- like over here, they take the dead bodies, they picked up the dead bodies and put them on a pile. It was a pile like a 10-story building. And from there, another group took them to the oven, to the--

Crematorium.

--to the crematorium. Over there, they were burned. And to me, it starts again. I run from one concentration camp to the other. From Gross-Rosen, took us to Buchenwald. In Buchenwald, I felt sick. And then they announced, whoever wants to go in a camp for labor, you could enlist yourself, which I did. Because I saw over there, my death is-- I wouldn't survive. So I figured, whatever will be, I'm going to-- I want to get out from over here. So I enlist myself in a labor camp. So they took me to-- from Buchenwald-- are you finished?

No, you've got a whole other side, about half an hour.

I'll to finish soon. So they took us in a concentration camp, to Bissingen, which was deeper in Germany again. And again, they took us on hard labor over there. We were in a group, which they took-- we were carrying electric poles, electric-- how do you call it-- electric poles, not little--

Telephone poles?

Telephone poles-- the big, heavy-- like the light poles over there on our shoulders. We were a group of 15. Luckily, I was one from the shortest. So the pole didn't reach me almost. But the other ones, they were falling. And whoever couldn't carry on, beating or killed, shoot him to death.

Now, over there, at least they gave us a little bit of food. They gave us where to sleep. So we were there for a couple of months. At one time, they took us for that labor, for that hard labor work. It was-- we thought it was the end of the war, like planes, fighter planes came very low.

And the Gestapo were walking with us, put us up by the wall. And it was English planes, which they start to throw bombs and everything. We runned into the farm over there. We took some food over there. They took us back to camp over there.

And in the camp, it was the same story. People were going around, and killing, and beating, and dying. From over there, again, the Russians came closer, over there where they took us, they transfer us to another camp, which it was from Bissingen to Staltach. It was near Dachau-- Allach-- to Allach.

In Allach, people were going around without clothes, also without food, a little bit of water, a little bit of soup-- one day yes, one day no. And it looked like that is the end already. You couldn't go on anymore. And again, at that time, they put us in. They said, we're going to be transferred.

And we didn't see any bright future for us. We thought that that is the end. They put us all on a train, on a freight train. And we knew that that is the end. There's not too far we can go. So luckily, this train start to move. It went a couple hours.

And naturally, they were holding us. And so we didn't know nothing what it goes on behind our back. But by the way it looked now, we find out that it was the Russians coming from one side. But we were already the Americans-- but we were-- the American Army was very close.

So at that time, it was-- everybody was praying to God, god forbid, that the last moment-- I mean, we knew that-- like a woman is going to give birth, having a baby, that the baby is very close. We knew that something should happen because we heard already, from the tanks, military tanks, military shooting, and whatnot-- and the train start to go back and forth, back and forth. And it looks like they didn't have where to go.

But luckily, the train leader, whoever it was, the Gestapo, he had an order to finish us off, to kill them, take us into the woods over there. If he couldn't reach the destiny, take them into the woods and killing us. But he didn't do that. And the American Army reached our train. And that was the moment when we got-- how you say, released?

Liberated.

That was the moment when we got liberated from the American Army. And the train was on one side, and the road was right across from our train. And soon, the American tanks came over there on the way, the Gestapo, the-- whoever, our leaders, each train, each wagon had two watchmen. So they runned away. And we, right away, it was moments undescrivable, everybody runned on the tanks.

And naturally, the Red Cross came in right away and gave us some food. And American soldiers, they gave us chocolate, they gave us bread. And we didn't let them go, everybody falling on the street. So they put us in the side. They gave everybody-- whoever need help, I mean, whoever was sick. They gave us food.

And that was the end of the concentration camp until we were liberated. But when I was liberated, at that time, I said, naturally, the first thing was food. I mean, everybody-- food, food because we were completely to death.

So the Red Cross gave us. From the military, it was. And everybody gave us some food. So I sit down. And that time, I took stock of myself, where am I? What will I do? I knew I have nobody. I knew I haven't got no family. Well, I find-- I mean, we made some friends with each other.

And the American Army took us over. And they put us in in a DP camp. In one moment, what I want to bring out over here, I made up with my brother, in case we survive, one of us, we should come back to Czyzew and look ourselves up. We'll meet by so-and-so Polack, by Mr.-- what's name is that-- Kotz. In case we cannot come, we will write to him.

So anyway, I see that start to look around. And I see that I-- sitting in Germany, in DP camp, I wouldn't accomplish nothing. And I have to look for a future. In the meantime, I find out-- I said to myself, yeah. I made myself a passport in Germany, over there in DP camp. And I went to Poland. I said to myself, I mean, I'm not going to be there. I just want to find out if anybody survived, if any of my family is there. In the meantime-- and I did so. I went.

In the meantime, I find out that in my town, which about 16-17 people survived-- and while they were there, being in one house, in a big house there, 15 of them-- the Polacks came in at night with bullets, with bats, with sticks, and killed 15 of them. And three runned away. In other word, after survival, after liberation, after going through what I had to go through, and they did survive, and they had to come to that lousy town of Czyzew with the Polacks over there, and they were killed.

Now, when I heard that story, I had to go there and find out about my family, about my brothers, sisters, my whole family. I made up myself that being I'm not going to step on that soil no more, I don't want to know from that country no more. But I have to go and find out what happened there.

So I put on clothes like nobody could recognize me, and nobody could be able to tell who I am. And I went to that Polack, Mr Kotz. And I told him-- I spoke to him, if you'll know anything, maybe or whatever. But the way it looks, I find out that my brother was killed in another camp. And I remained the only survivor.

So I was in Germany. I came back to Germany at that time, that moment. And I said, my future is now to go to Israel. But being Israel was under the England, and I couldn't go there, and it was closed, and I didn't want to take a chance and go again with the underground, and I had my aunt over here, Mrs. Lipman in New York. She looked me up.

And I find out, she's my mother's sister, which I find her. And she find me through the United-- through the UGA or whatever. And I came to the US. I got married. And well, over here, I raised a family. I have a nice wife, nice children. And God bless America.

Thank you for the interview. Thank you very much.

Now, give me your name. If for something, I'll know who I talked to. I want to know who you are.

My name? My name is Abby Lewis.

Could I have?

Yes.