

I'm at the American gathering of Jewish Holocaust survivors, and interviewing Meyer Shnurman, who lives now in Des Moines, Iowa. Mr. Shnurman?

Yes. My name is Meyer Shnurman. I am born in Lodz, Poland 4th of April, 1922.

In 1939, I was 17, the German Wehrmacht came in to Poland. In three days, they occupied Lodz, our town. They took it over with a peaceful meaning. And a few months later, they turned it over to the Gestapo.

We thought that we will be able to live in peace as conquered country. But we found out very quick that isn't so. Being I was a young man, I was right the way put to work. And then in April, they closed the Lodz ghetto.

What year was that?

In 1940.

The war started in 1939, in October, whenever they marched in. That's when World War II started. And they closed-- they said the Jews are going to be working in this part of the town which they call it the ghetto. And they wired around with wires, and bridged, and said this is going to be the place where you're going to work for the German, the Third Reich. And you're going to be a part of the Third Reich, which is Hitler had in mind to take over this part of Lodz, would be the [NON-ENGLISH], and Lodz was included in that Third Reich.

And for a while we had hope. We start seeing when they start moving the people in the center of town, in our area where the ghetto was, which is a concentrated old part of the city. And they give them just-- they said they're going to give him three days to move in the ghetto. When actually they give him one hour at night. And they chased them out of their houses and brought him in, in the ghetto. Who didn't cooperate, they were shot, beaten, chased in. And they left everything, all possessions behind.

I happened to be living in that part of of the ghetto before the war. I was born in that area. For me, I know that area pretty good. I didn't like what they was trying to do. I was trying to escape to Russia. I and my father went all the way to by Bialystok which is part of Russia. And we thought maybe we can cross the border and go to Russia, and we wouldn't be have trapped by the Nazis.

But it turned out, we stayed a few months by the border. It turned out the Russians took Poland from the other side. And they divided Poland, Eastern Poland for the Russians, and they had a pact, the Russians, there's going to be peace with them. And this is going to be part of the German Reich what they took.

Well, we know better that, after they closed in the ghetto, they made us work. They call it the resorts. What you call?

Did you go back to the ghetto?

Yeah, I went back home because I had my wife, my mother-- not wife-- my mother. And my father went back to the ghetto to my mother and two sisters. I am from a twin. I had twin sister, and I had another sister, a younger one. And we said, just as well be all together whatever's going to happen, and where we find out what they are up to do.

They start [INAUDIBLE] their own, take all the money away, all the weapons. Everything had to be turned into them, all the gold, all the silver. You have to volunteer everything. They call it volunteered. But what they had also, Polish people helping them find out whoever if anybody had anything.

When you and your father went to Bialystok?

Yeah?

You left the rest of the family behind. What were the plans that were made?

That we will go, and we will take them over. We're going to try to go ourselves, and see what's all about it.

To see if there was any safety.

Any safety, yeah, right.

You didn't know where you were going to go in Russia.

No, no. We didn't know.

And then you thought you would somehow get yourself back?

Yeah.

You would go or your father?

I would go, I would go or my father, one of us, and bring the rest of the family back. Because I had an uncle in Russia, which he was an engineer, and before the war he was trying to take us over. He was living in Moscow.

And you found that you could not get into Russia?

We found out that Russia was already occupied Poland. And we found out we could not go through. And we didn't go through. We went back.

You couldn't get through legally.

Legally, right.

And you didn't try to get through illegally?

Illegally, a lot did.

Too dangerous.

Well, we figured, we seen that there is no end over there. We didn't see anything better what the Russian was trying to do in the beginning. But it was-- there wasn't killing. At that time, they wasn't killing anybody. There were just big promises with the Germans, so with the Russians. We didn't know what the Germans was up to. We heard about what they were doing in [? Auschwitz ?] and building like Dachau. We heard about it. But we didn't see anything happen drastically.

When they closed the ghetto, they didn't kill anybody. They just made everybody work. They built their own factories. They made us in charge of it, police. And then we get Judenrat, what you call elders, taking care of the people, bring in supplies, and we will work for the Germans. There was still an open area. We can go in and out, in the beginning.

And then May, April or May, they closed it completely. Nobody could go out, nobody could go in. It was closed, and nobody could-- it was they said, if anybody is going to move that thing, they'll start issuing declarations or [NON-ENGLISH] in Jewish, declarations different from those guys in charge there says that we cannot move. We cannot go. We have to do what we've been told. It will be obliged by the people, of our own people. The Germans gave the orders to the elders, what we can do and what we cannot do.

Then we started working. I was a carpenter, a cabinet maker.

Your father too?

My father was a weaver. So they confiscated that. They give it all to the Germans. He was working for a big factory. They took it over. This was outside the ghetto. They took it over, and give it to the Germans. Everything was become German property.

Well, it was we're supposed to build stuff for the military to help them. As being woodworker, as a craftsman, we had a little specialty. We had special food, a little bit, a little extra food, a little extra different things. We had a little more privileges. And I helped my family, and I said, well, so long they don't kill us, we have no choice to be here.

Why did you have the extra privileges?

Because of being a professional. They give-- they said they needed professionals, and they will give them privileges. They will give some of those people, whoever is special. I was 20 years old. But when I got in there, I was 19. This was in 1941. I was 19 years old. And they wanted people who could work, and their families. My father was 40, so he was still physical, and my mother was 38 or 37, so physical, able to work.

They let us be it at that good time. Then later, on they start demanding people to get out of the ghetto for work, work camps outside. They demanded 10,000 in a time, 20,000, from the Judenrat. You understand what I'm talking about, Judenrat, the government, part of the inside government. They demanded they needed 20,000 or 30,000 people. They're going to be working outside. They will have to pack all their clothes, and pack all their feather beds and dishes.

But later on, we found out they send them to Treblinka. Outside, the boxcars didn't go very far. They stayed outside, and the people, they went to the gas chambers. This was in 1941. And right away, we start seeing horrors.

The food was start shortening. The winter was bad. They start sending bad, less food for the people, and they start-- people stopped get malnutrition. Starvation start to get. People start getting no medical care.

And this was in the ghetto?

In the ghetto. All in the ghetto, all happened in Lodz, what they call it? They tried to rename it Litzmannstadt. They start to rename Lodz. They was trying to change the map of Europe. Lodz they called Litzmannstadt. That's what the Third Reich, [INAUDIBLE] the Third Reich further.

They did a very good propaganda for the people. They saw that people are not suspicious. Whoever what you call-- rebelled, organization rebelled, they took him in, or they beat him to death, or they did something. They there never come out alive.

I used to belong to an organization, they call them Bund, which is a workmen's socialist party organization. We were advised not to do anything for them. They had outside connections. Because I was young. And because he said, well, if we're going to do it, we're going to do it as a mass. We're not going to do it as a single person, take in the own hands law or something.

They had what you call a radio connection with the outside world. So you had no connection whatsoever. And it started getting worse. Food started getting less. The winter was cold. Everything was piled up outside. Potatoes and bread and flour was getting short. We started printing their own money. The ghetto, they had their own money. Take all the German money away, all the foreign currencies away. They start printed their own paper, like here, like footsteps, similar. And they were worthless, \$2,000 a bread, \$200 a pound of potato peel. \$500 a regular pound of potatoes.

Whoever couldn't work in those places, starvation started to turn in. People started getting malnutrition. They start starving, and they didn't have no medication, and no nutrition, and no whatsoever human needs whatsoever.

And they seen the people was getting desperate. And they keep the men, like every month, or every two months, they start the men people to get out of the ghetto. Well, one of my sisters, she was a nurse. I'm the twin from her. She registered for the Germans to go out to work with them, because she couldn't stand it. Because she's seen people start

getting less food, and less, and she didn't want to take away the food from anybody. She registered to go to work for the Germans.

She thought she'd be treated humanely, because they ask for volunteers. Those volunteers didn't mean nothing. They went out, and shipped them out. We found out later at the end of the war, I found out they took them to build autobahns, which means highways, women, railroads and all that thing. They killed her right in there. They mixed her probably in cement machine, or whatever happened to her. I have no idea.

I found one girl after the war, and she didn't want to say a word about it. Because she just-- she was, when I found her right after the war, she was silent. She said, I don't know what happened to her. There was a whole group of women, young women in their 20s, early 20s. 20 years old, actually. It was 1942.

And then on, they had Aussiedlung. That means-- Aussiedlung means-- oh if I describe, but it was-- they're going to say if the Judenrat won't give us that amount what we demand, there was time to connive and not to give them that amount. It was bargained with them. Let's say they demand 50,000 or 20,000. They said, well, we won't give it to you. Then they start demanding older people, and very young people.

And then we found out what they're doing with it. And then they decided we're not going to bargain with the Judenrat, with the Jewish people in the ghetto. We're going to go in, seal the ghetto off inside, from inside, make everybody go out and stand in the street. And we pick them up.

This is 1942. My father was already dead. They worked him to death, in tearing down the buildings. They was clearing, part of the ghetto they was clearing for the Third Reich the buildings, taking brick by bricks apart, and trying to clear for to build German monuments, build German things, at the heart of the city. This was outside the ghetto he was working, where they worked him to death. No food, so he died before the Aussiedlung. They called it Aussiedlung, which means transports, what they take transports.

He died about a month before. And my mother was already sick. She was a big, husky strong woman. She was throwing up all the way. And she was in her early 40s. And I said, I will not give up my mother. So I was hiding her in the attic, inside behind the boards. And I know all the people, what they took out on that Aussiedlung, that--

Transport.

Big transports they send it to a prison inside. And at night, it comes cars, and they took them away, outside to the gas chambers from the ghetto, outside. We found out people sneaked out and found out there's gas chambers 20 or 30 miles away, which is Majdanek, it was not far from Lodz. It's just burning people coming in. This the first burning crematoriums that they built, before Auschwitz.

I should have not in my life, I would give her up. And I did what I could. I put my own life. I said it didn't bother me if they take me. So I hid her. I hid her for seven days. Every night I went up there, took her food in the attic. She was laying there. And I didn't give her up. I myself got caught from the German in that Aussiedlung, in that. So they took me to the prison. And I couldn't even go get back to my mother. She didn't know where I was.

They took me to prison. And they locked me up. And I said, this is the end. And when I went to that prison, I know that yard, because I was born in that area. I know every street and every corner of that thing. I said, not in my life they're going to take me alive here. If I have to die here, I'm going to die here. I'm not going out to the gas chamber.

So as a young boy, I don't know. I was not a strong boy. I was just that's-- that spirit, that willing to live is just-- I said, no. I'm not going with them, not on my life. So I went out, and in that prison they took the women, children that same room. And I said, and I start like suddenly become a speaker.

I just-- I said, people, behave yourself. We, none of them going to be out alive here. We've got to break out or do something to get out. So there was a prison with bars, steel bars on the window. And outside with a guard. It was not a German guard, but Jewish police, which are called the ghetto police. And outside from the ghetto police was Germans.

But inside, it was guarded by our Jewish police. And it was just prison. Those people were supposed to go away to the gas chamber.

Did you know that particular guard?

I didn't know--

The Jewish guard?

I didn't know him.

He was from Lodz, do you think?

Just police, he was from Lodz, yeah. We was from Lodz. He was the elite police. He was their trustee. He couldn't do hardly anything. So suddenly, by setting it was done-- dawn, I mean about 5:00 or 6 o'clock in the evening. And I said, tomorrow morning you won't be alive. And people started doing the darndest thing in that room. 50 people in one room. A room about 15 by 10, 50 people. We had a bucket of water and a barrel for the waste. And they start acting like animals, and so, right?

Right then and there on the same day, I said no. No way. So I went up to the bars. I was trying to break the bars with my hand, no way I could do it.

So you were trying to get them to break out?

Break out.

But they didn't seem to respond?

They just didn't respond. They acted like just their need was so great. And some of them has--

They wanted to drink.

They wanted to drink, and some of had their waste, and it started to smell already. And people have not good [INAUDIBLE]. They're going to kill my boy. And some of them had small children in there. I said, it doesn't matter. I said, you people are doomed. I told them, and I had suddenly just then when I stood up in that window, I seen a man walking outside.

That man was the chief of the police of our factory. He wasn't looking for me. He was looking for his own family. How he got there with all the guards.

He was a Jewish man?

A Jewish man, chief of police in the ghetto.

In the ghetto?

They had police, they had police, the chief of police. They had the lieutenants, no, just like a regular thing. He was-- we had a president of that resort. We had-- he was the chief of police to make order. They had two kind of administration. You're supposed to have, you work with the president what provided raw material, food for the working people in that ghetto, the raw material like, wood, glue, machinery. He's supposed to be protect it for the Germans. He's a Jewish man. He's supposed to report to them, the Germans. He was the head man, Rosen was his name. I remember, like seeing him today.

I looked through that window. And I seen it. I said Mr. Rosen. I start yelling. The window was open. There was no there

was no windows, just bars. Look, I'm here. I was hysterical, I was real hysterical. I don't know. I must have had a-- god was there. I don't know. I'll leave it to you. He walked back. He looked at me. He recognized me. He had 2,000 people working in the factory. He knew who I was, because I had a specialty-- I was working in the shop in that factory, a specialty. I was making the inlays for the German Gestapo.

When you make boots, you have to make a form to make it fit to that person. I was 10 people in that we saw it was making those inlets. And I was one of them. He recognized me. He said, what are you doing here?

I said Mr. Rosen. He just went to the window outside. I said I got caught in Aussiedlung. The reason why I got caught, I was trying to escape. And when they got me, they lay me down on the wagon. And they stepped on me. And I was laying all the way to the prison, because I was trying to jump the wagon too. I said I got caught here by just trying to escape from death.

So he went up. He went in the back door, to get in, to let me out, to go talk to the policeman. He was a head of those police. He said, he start talking. For some reason, he went back and he didn't do nothing. So for the second time, I start-- I start holding those bars. And then other people start yelling women, children. So he went back again. He opened the door.

The other guy opened that door, the steel door.

Who was it that opened the door?

That guy, that guard.

The guard did?

Yeah, the guard. So I ran out in the yard. There was bushes.

Anyone else ran out too?

Everybody, everybody ran out from that cell. And they just-- and they started blowing the whistle. There's an escape. And it was just in the yard. We couldn't get out. We wasn't outside yet, because it was a high fence, a 10-foot fence, a wooden fence. There was bushes around. So I knew my way. There were bushes. So I said to another couple of kids, younger kids, I said, let's run this way. I know my way out from here.

So I ran and I seen that wooden fence. And I said, how I'm going to climb a 10-foot fence, with just smooth. There's nothing-- so I climbed on the ground, and I seen a hole with knots. The wood had knots. It was a knots hole, because pine. And I stick my finger in. I was young boy. You just you should have seen me. I must have weighed no more than 100 pounds.

I don't know what. I have to hold on board. And I said, oh my gosh. I'm going to get there too. So I put my finger in. I put my other hand over. One of them-- I broke that one board. Then I broke another one. And I went through outside. I was outside that fence. It was already dark. I went home.

The funny part of it, I had potatoes. There was a farm, potatoes where they're grown. Everybody like here-- what do they call it? They call it vegetable farms where they grow their own food.

A garden.

Garden. Over there was they called the gardens. There was little gardens, just survival gardens was outside. This was outside actually where the area was. And I had kept holding onto those potatoes. Imagine, when I came into prison, I had those potatoes. And when I walked out, I held them on.

My mother wasn't laying in the attic. This was the ghetto was closed. There was that which called an Aussiedlung. And

I went to my mother. I never told her what I did. She was wondering I will ever come back. So I took her down from upstairs. At night, I took her down, laid her on the bed. She was swollen. She couldn't walk. But I survived that thing. They never found me. They never found me. I'd never go out. I was myself hiding. This lasted for seven days.

There was Germans come with dogs in, and all that. They didn't [INAUDIBLE]. We had cellars. We had upstairs, downstairs. Those dogs didn't get very much. Some of them, they shoot people. We seen right other way, it was just terrible. So I kept my mother and my sister was there alive, my youngest sister who lived there in the ghetto. This was 1942. Four weeks later, she died in the ghetto. Just starvation, just swelled up and died, just laid down. Just was dead. So we buried--

From starvation?

From starvation, just after my father, so she died. And we stayed in the ghetto until 1944.

Well, in the meantime, there was certain-- and then they started to liquidate the ghetto in '44, in August. They said we got another one of those political maneuvers what they did. They said, we've got to resettle you from here, from Lodz to Germany.

Now, the Germans had been in this town already two years--

In town, they surrounded--

--at least?

Four years.

Four years. And you had been in the ghetto?

All the time in the ghetto, all the time in Lodz ghetto. We was working for them, building furniture, everything. Building-- I was-- happened to be a little higher up, a special-- well our shop was higher up. We had special privilege, like I told you. So I and my sister, she worked in a straw resort, which call it-- they made straw boots. I don't know if you ever seen it, to keep them warm. And keep them warm in the snow, in Russia.

Those stores there, and she worked there, and I worked in that factory. So in August, they start everybody, they're going to resettle the whole ghetto. There will be nobody in the ghetto. They said, you people are too good. You're valuable. You're going to be deported to Germany.

How many were you left, was it just a small number?

Oh, there must be 50,000, 60,000.

Oh, there were a large number of people still?

Sure, Lodz ghetto, see what they did, during the meantime, they brought in from the little towns, whoever it was commit some crimes. They concentrate everything. So they can't get a hold of them. They brought in German people from Germany. They didn't even know, they was Jewish. In the third generation Germans, in Czechoslovakia, in Hungary. They got people all over in the ghetto. In the ghetto, they didn't live four weeks, they was dead in hunger.

They thought-- they came in-- they came in fancy trains to our ghetto. They'll let them in. They tell them, carry the dishes. But there was no food.

A lot of people starved to death, people who had been living in Lodz, like yourself, and people who'd been taken from other places.

Starved, they died from starvation, malnutrition, just whole families disappeared, just died. So whoever survived, whoever had a little bit strength. And the young, and the younger-- when you're young, your bones bend more. You had more strength to do some of those things. It seems to me the young ones just died just so fast, just more luck with one of them with another, because there was no medication, nothing. They all had to die. They all was doomed to die there. We could not get out of there alive.

It was very, very bad. Surrounded the Germans together was very-- it was closed ghetto. It was surrounded. It looked like Warsaw. The Lodz ghetto was closed ghetto, they call it. Surrounded with Germans, whoever they found by the wires, they got shot right by the wire, too close. You couldn't go 10 feet close, no closer to the wall.

Then in '44 they said they're going to Aussiedlung the ghetto. So that's all.

That's side two. Part of Meyer Shnurman oral history from the Holocaust. I'm interviewed by Janet Waxman of Washington, DC. And the day of the Holocaust gathering April 12, 1983.

After that, they said they're going to send us out to work camps. So then we found out, that took us in boxcars. After the boxcars, everybody was loaded in boxcars. They came in with dogs. They called that a special commando [NON-ENGLISH], the Aussiedlung kommando Aussiedlung. That means Einsatz Aussiedlung, the special troops, who had experience in that field.

Like you have a difference in your armed forces, like Marines or something. They had difference in those groups, the Gestapo. And they start loading us in boxcars. They told us just take whatever you can. And we're going to be resettled. They told us nothing where or when.

They give us bucket of water in those boxcars, and a loaf of bread, everybody. We traveled for seven days, seven nights. Some of them died right in the boxcars.

Who were with?

We had human waste-- I and my sister, that's all was left. The one sister went to the war camp. My mother and father died of starvation in the ghetto. I left them there. We didn't know what to do. We just-- we know-- we saw it's the end. Then we come to Auschwitz, Birkenau, this was a quarantine camp. We found out this camp says Auschwitz, Arbeit macht frei. That means work makes a man free. That's their word written with wire, barbed wire and all that.

In German or in Polish?

Auschwitz, Auschwitz.

Was the sign in Polish?

Yeah. In German.

In German?

German, because Jewish people speak German, because they understand Jewish language is a part of a German-- German, their language, part of their slang. It's very similar to the German for some reason. Just because different Jews speak a little bit different dialect. Some of their words is just like, we could understand most of what they said if they wasn't-- if they didn't have a dialect. But we understand what they want from us, what they said to us.

Everything was written in German and talking in German. They didn't-- we also had Polish collaborators with the Germans, then they also speak in Polish, which some of the Jews didn't understand Yiddish. They speak like you speak American, they speak Polish. This was part of Poland too, where they had some translators. This was they collaborated. They made it sound like you're going to a resort, some kind of resort, not to a concentration camp.



Well, when we come and start unloading, the Sonderkommando this was already people from Lodz, the Sonderkommando was a group working for the Germans. They had high privileges, physical, hardworking men. They was working in the crematoriums, taking the people in the crematoriums, and taking all the possessions away with the Germans. It was a tough group. They call it the Sonderkommando, which was working for the Germans. They had privileges.

But they didn't have very much privileges. They keep changing them. They keep destroying them. And some of the guys told us what this camp is all about. We see four crematoriums when we walked in, bit tall chimneys, about 40, 50 feet in the air. This was in Birkenau, Auschwitz, close to Krakow, around it, in that area, Szczecin.

This is what they call Auschwitz, was to burn all the Jewish people. Then Birkenau was a camp. They started separating the men, after walking out of those boxcars, they start separating men and women, to take all their possessions, undressed naked, shaved, deloused. You know what delousing is? Get all the bugs out of you, whatever you have some kind of, those things. They thought all the Jews are dirty and unclean. That's what they-- unhuman, they're not even human. They wouldn't even considered them as being human, some of those Germans.

They thought we're some kind of people from space, animal, ape, ape family, or something worse. We've seen all those things. We just pray to God we just can't survive, and just do something to them, just survive and have somebody.

So they took us younger people, I was 22, fit to work. I was blonde, so they liked that. And my sister, same thing, young blonde.

Blonde and blue eyed?

Right, yeah. They didn't even know how we got there. They thought everybody is dark complected, Jewish people. But this is not-- anyhow, they took those people. In one side women, one side men on other side. We could see them undressed and actually naked. Shaving off the women, shaved their head off. And the man shaving, delousing. And the people with kids, and elder people with young kids in the other side. They went to the gas station right away. They went to-- they call it shower rooms away.

They used Zyklon B. Mothers, young mothers, went with their kids. And they didn't have to go to the gas chambers. They could go to work. But they went with their kids rather. They told them, we take. They didn't let them. They said, I got to go with my kids. Ladies like you, maybe younger.

But we know, found out the right way, on this day we found out what the other side looks like. They said if anybody is hiding any diamonds or gold or anything, they're going to find it. They're going to be-- they're going to be killed right away. They're going to be sent-- after we got in there--

Actually, you think they told the mothers that the children were going to be killed, and then the mothers--

No, no. They never said anything about that.

The mothers just said, I won't be separated from--

I won't be separated from my children.

Were the mothers and children being shaved and so on?

Shaved, yeah.

They were being--

But those-- I think those who went to the gas chamber, I don't think so they even bothered. Yeah, they still shaved them. That's right. They still shaved them. They still shaved them for the [NON-ENGLISH] have a regular shower, and go

with delousing, lice.

They did all that?

They did, yeah. They did.

After doing that, they put him in-- they look all alike. They went through the other side they had those rooms packed in with Zyklon B. And that what takes out the air. Zyklon B was a chemical, it takes out the oxygen. And the people suffocated. It takes about two or three minutes, you're dead. And then right away loading doors like conveyors, those people to the gas chambers. Load like coal mine railroad deal, but went right straight right to the ovens. Burned the bodies, bones.

How do I know it? I worked later on that.

They-- burned them in those prison clothes, or they even took the clothes off?

They took the clothes off. They had to pile them up. Those clothes was searched in piles. They found gold, there was in separate-- eyeglasses, hair, all was separated, whatever they can make use of it. They could hide for them rings, teeth fillings, eyeglasses. People who had golden teeth, fillings. And Polish people have a lot of golden teeth. You don't see it here so much, where they made it out of gold, like you make a crown. Or they had like to put like a tooth, but golden in. They had gold in their mouth, and valuable rings.

They cut off their hands, if they couldn't get the rings off. But they made everybody do it. Those people would never come back to the other side. It was burning day and night, those crematoriums. With barbed wires, and high, high wires, high like prisons, big prisons. High voltage wire, 440 volts. This was on other side, Birkenau. This was a selection they would let live.

Those people from the gas chamber, we could smell those people burning. We didn't stay there. This was Birkenau. We were still in Birkenau. This was a quarantine camp. The other side was a working camp. This was Auschwitz, another side, another part of the factory. There was big barracks, long barracks. We didn't have no bunk beds, what you see in a picture. We were sleeping on the floor, on cement. Or for some reason they had big, big rocks, whatever it come from. I have no idea. It must have come from Czechoslovakia, some big rocks.

We were sticking six people in one rock, hiding, laying one on each other, just all men. Then we start getting one soup or one piece of bread a day. This was now Birkenau. They said we're going to be resettled from there. We're going to go to the factories, to Germany. A man is going to come buy us, like selling cattle. He will take--

Slaves?

Slaves. They will take us to Germany. Whoever wants to go in different coal mine or salt mine, go for the tattoo number. I said, I'm not going back to Poland. I heard about Polish. So I didn't want to go back to Poland to those mines, because I heard. I found out it Lodz ghetto, because people from the mines never got out of life. So I sneaked away from those things. I never even have a number.

So I didn't register a number on my arm. So I went to Germany. At the beginning, I stayed in that Birkenau. All along, all the time, and I went to Dr. Mengele. You've probably heard of-- four times I see him.

Four times you went through the selection?

I went through their selections in Birkenau, stood straight still, with my chest out, so it's just fit to work. So finally, the last day they took us, there was all the selections went out to work. How we do it, went out to work. There was very few left. I don't know how many, was a few left. They kept me in Auschwitz. Then they start to open the gate. After Auschwitz was already away, this was the working people sent away from there, they took people from Birkenau, from that quarantine, and send them on the other side, cleaning up the gas chambers.

There wasn't burning anymore at that time. They quit burning in November.

Of what year?

In 1944. I think the reason why, they found out there was all defeated by the Eastern Front, this was my point of view. They were already defeated on Eastern Front. Russia, they had a very bad defeat. I think there was defeated in Africa. They had all, and there was-- and I think it was already D-Day in Europe in '44. I think D-Day was in 1944. I can't remember the date.

I had very political-- I was very political minded. What time-- what they're doing.

At the time you were thinking of all these things.

At the time, thinking of all those things.

Were you discussing it with anyone, or just--

Well, we were discussing. But we didn't know very much. I have--

But you did talk to each other.

I have friend. We talk to each other. Yeah. We was laying in those-- we well they fooled us. They said-- they pretended we already liberated. They did all kinds of tricks, how we're going to react in case are we going to be liberated. They did all kinds of it, some of those people who did that, give them time to take revenge of them. They took groups from us, and they sent them away. And they-- to the death camps. So there wasn't burning anymore. They quit burning in November 1944.

Whoever they tell you they was burning later, it's not true. They quit, dismantling the ovens. Hide the evidence, because the Russian troops was already in Poland on other side. I can't remember how far they was in Poland, because I have no idea. But we found out from people.

So when they started dismantling the crematoria.

Dismantling the crematorium.

You thought maybe at the time--

I started working, working inside at Auschwitz on the other side. And we thought we might be liberated from the Russians. We had hope. Because we seen it was the end of it. We've seen how they acted. They gave us more food. Suddenly, we start getting food. They let us eat it. They give us more bread. They give us more soup. But before there, was nothing.

Why do you think once they started doing that, giving you more?

Because they know it's the end of it.

They didn't want other people to see you so emaciated?

They was trying to see that maybe we're trying-- in case they get caught by the Allies, that we will say good things about them. Or there was more food left for that particular area, but there was not enough people to consume the food. Do you understand I mean, like sending let's say that they had 200,000 loaves or 50,000. They had nothing to do. And we were working. We was pushing the wagons, load loading stuff, bones, and hair, and clothes, and bricks. And we was working inside, the other side of Auschwitz.

And then one night we found out we had to go. They took us on boxcars again. They gave us food. And they shipped us around all over Germany.

Why did you think they were doing that?

Maybe they was trying to hide the evidence. They didn't want to leave us behind.

They didn't want the to find you?

The Allies to find us, they was trying to actually destroy us, to find us alive. They think whoever is going to be-- they knew that November, the Allies-- the Allies the Russian, Eastern Front was close. There was Warsaw was liberated already. Lodz was--

You think that by moving around--

To Germany.

--that they were hoping to kill you along the way?

They thought-- they was told it. Yeah, they did. They were trying to set us on a-- on a high bridge, and the whole, all 100 boxcars, and just-- just drop dropped us and put the boxcars in a river. They was trying to set and explode the bridges, and just drown us. And I know it's a fact. This was what they said. What proof? I have no idea.

Who said that?

Some of the people, it was rumors they were trying to move us. Those people had outside contact with the Germans, with the Germany Gestapo, and it would come back to us inside. See, we was working close to them. There's people working for them, or doing some of their personal things. You know, shining their shoes, or they like one guy, or he was almost young. Maybe they just remind themselves of their own family. Take a young blond kid, he said, it could be my family, you know?

They finally start to have a conscience, after all the things what they did.

At the end, they started having a conscience?

Yeah. They seen all the-- they knew all about it. They knew all about it. But they didn't try to reveal it to us. They didn't--

Why do you think it was at the end that they started having a conscience?

Well, because they know their end is coming. Their victory is coming to an end. Because even the propaganda was high, they're seeing that the war was over for them. When they start bombing-- when they start bombing Berlin, start to bombing those cities to ashes. Their families, they start getting letters, their cities was destroyed.

So were they having more sympathy for you?

No. It's the fact that counted. They didn't have no sympathy. It's the fact, what the Allies did. They know it's going to be a revenge. When the Allies start bombing their own hometown, Berlin was bombed. Hamburg was bombed. The factory was bombed. They had no supply line. The Allies took already the river. They're closing in on the Berlin. Defeated on Eastern Front, defeated 100,000 troops on the Eastern Front. They knew those things. They knew they were stopped by the Allies.

And you were getting more food, and yet you were also at other times being moved around.

Moved around.

And you think that perhaps they were just trying to kill you.

Kill you, right, as evidence. There was different command, different-- it's different commanders were trying to do different things on their own. Someone was scared to do anything, and some of us said, they didn't know nothing. They just obeyed, just like I tell you to kill 100 people out there. Just because what you believe in Hitler. Some of them had conscience, not all of them. Those people, they were just human beings, and they found out the shoes-- the tide thrown against them. But they knew from home their houses was bombed. Their families was killed.

Some of them didn't come back to the front. They started getting information in those things. This was in '44. I mean, this was the end of the war.

Was there any kind of a feeling for these?

How did you feel about these people? You know that these things were happening.

How I feel about those people?

Yes.

There was no feeling for them. We had nothing to feel for them. They was considered us as unhuman. I just seemed like their mind was set that Jewish people was not human.

Did you consider them inhuman?

No.

It was never considered.

We were considering them as a high intelligent.

At that point?

At the--

For all that had happened?

Yeah. We was concerned them as murderers.

As murderers.

We had no other-- what they did, they throw people down from the windows in the ghetto. Like I said, they took mental-- we had mental hospitals in our city, Lodz. There was a quarter of a million Jewish people there. And when they tried to clear it, they said what are they going to do? What can mentally disturbed people do for us? So they took-- they told the ordinance, the people. They went in. They took them, throw them down, six and seven floors, throw them down on the ground. They didn't waste a bullet, threw them out the windows. And they killed them right on the spot. They said they're just useless people.

Their mind was set. The Jewish people, they're not human. That's what they told their young generation, What they called the strippers and what they called it? German young-- the German young organization. I forgot the name.

I forgot too.

Yeah, there is a name. So they wouldn't even consider us being human. You could see in those pictures, what you see in an exhibit. You ever seen some of those pictures? They just-- they considered them as being high mighty, holy and godly. They couldn't be God. They just they consider us a slave. No, I wouldn't. This such never happened in the history of Jewish. And I read about Jewish history, Bible. I read about the Spanish Inquisition. I was-- and I come from a family which was well versed, just what we call middle class. But they call it intelligence a little bit more.

Well I'm not trying to say that I shouldn't-- just I'm fine. Just, I know what was going on, from just an educational part. And we never seen that. And going all through history there's such a thing could even happen.

And I never considered myself to save my own skin. I wanted to just survive, leave somebody just leave there, after that thing is all done, how they're going to be acting. How are they going to act, and how are we going to act?

What do you mean?

I mean by that, that after the liberation, they thought we are not-- we are not-- they depict us as not being human, just plain simple, being not even ape-- I would keep my ape. I would let him go. I don't know what was set in their mind, how we're supposed to look today. But the funny part is, after we was liberated, if I might go-- they want us Jewish people, Jewish people, be their best friend.

They didn't want nothing to do with Ukraine, with Polacks, or with Russia. If you Jewish survivors, they thought we are the most gracious, and the most gentle people in the world after the war. I found some people. They wanted to give us their house. They wanted to share with us what they had. I don't know why they did it. Or they did it--

Do you think they had been Nazis, or they had--

They'd been Nazis.

They had been.

They have been Nazis. Their wives are Nazis. The men, we didn't see it. But we dealt with them.

Why?

They wanted to give us everything. They wanted to share everything what they had. And when they dealt-- when we dealt what you call commercial with them, sold them or give them something after the war, they didn't want to deal with the Polacks, with the Polish. If we were Jewish, it helped with our dealing, because they know-- they found us more gentle, more humane. We're not going to go out and kill them.

Because some of the Polish people, when they sliced their throat, they killed them right after the war. They did, what you call revenge. Jewish people didn't do that. They didn't did an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Even they, it was-- I was just thinking to find somebody who survived. That's all.

So let's go from there. Well, I'm just getting a little bit what I was trying to say. We went in Germany, we went to Braunschweig. They took us from Auschwitz to Braunschweig. And we was in another hard camp, starvation, hunger. We went in 2,000 in Auschwitz. We came out about 200 alive. And this was in five, six short months. From 2,000. There was starvation in that camp every day.

We got up 5 o'clock in the morning, marched to work about five miles in that Hermann Goering work, BÄ¼ssing factory, a factory what was building trucks, in Braunschweig. There was AG firm too, which was one of the biggest factories. The company is still in the family. They was murders themselves. They was buying slaves. Actually, speaking, we wasn't doing nothing. We just was there guarded. Told we were going to die, and everything.

There was so much bombing in that factory, they took us down to bunkers. There was one day, we came out, there was

no factory left. It was destroyed. The city was pretty much destroyed. They still didn't give us to march, that comes with us. But the funny part of it, what they did, wasn't the their own doing. But they got such machinery, and like they took, they empty all the prisons, murderers and the made in charge them, of us Jews. Like somebody had a life sentence, killed before the war his wife or his brother for revenge for I don't for what.

They let them be-- they made him in charge of this prison camp. And he had everything. He had-- was going a lot of-- a lot of young kids, what you call, they did supposed to have sexual things with the young boys in the camp. There was the pimps, what you call? Like pimps. You understand what I'm talking about. In that camp.

Who were the pimps? The Jewish people?

The Jewish people, they made them. Yeah, just young boys, they make them available. So they survive. They have better food and all that. They made it that way. That was a privilege. They didn't do nothing. They give them a better beds and food and all that.

Did you wish that you could have been one of them?

No. I wished nothing. I was fine. It wasn't mine. Well, those young kids didn't-- what they did, I suppose, they did it in a gentle way. That the kid didn't even know about it. It was younger boys, most of them was--

Like how old?

15, 16. They let them live. I was in the 20s. So they couldn't make so much use of those people. But those people who was in charge of those prison camps, those murderers, they had your life in their head. They received rations, bread rations, the cigarette rations, whatever. You got a cigarette a month, for the motivation or generation of supervision.

They had this in their possession. They could give you half of it, keep for their own people. They must have about two or three of them, or five people. But it was just taking care of his bunk bed, his area, where he was. But he actually, according to law, he was a murderer. He was a German murderer. And they made him in charge of political prisoners, of Jewish prisoners.

Who were the young boys having to go to bed with, to have sexual relations with? With these murderers?

With those murderers, yeah. Well, they just-- yeah, they had their own pimps, little kids. They were using them. But that was not-- that was not-- that's the end of it.

We're almost at the end. Is there one special word that you would want to say?

You should never forget. Israel has to live. At any cost, any costs. Maybe 10 Jews in the world, Israel has to stay alive. There has be an Israel, because whatever country, something happened, you have a homeland.