

Imperial War Museum
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SCHINDLER

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Q : Mila, I want to ask you first of all, in fact I'm not going to ask you about *Plaszow*, I am going to ask you about life in the ghetto.

MILA : Okay.

Q : And what the sort of restrictions were that the Germans put on Jews and what happened to your life as a result.

MILA : When we came to the Ghetto, we were the least of our possessions. Well I didn't have too many because I lost everything already. In my city of *Lodz* you know, I am not from Krakow. But in the Krakow ghetto, we came with the least of our possessions. We had to share apartments if we had any apartments, with several other families. We had to wear the armbands. We were forced to work besides we were confronted with daily *mistreatings* daily our selections or daily, so called, actions, you know, the transports were they, for instance, one day *Poldek* and I at the time were working ...

Q : Sorry Mila we have a problem with the microphone.

CUT

Q : Mila, perhaps you
can tell me again, 'cause we didn't get any
of the sound track.

MILA : Well, we came to the
ghetto. First of all, of course, there was
a sence of confinement, because we couldn't
have any privacy. We couldn't have any
apartments of our own, like a family should
have an apartment. We had to share it, so
sometimes one bedroom was shared by several
families. They divided the room by some
curtains made of sheets and so on. Our
possessions were to bare minimum. We were
not especially hungry in the Krakow ghetto
yet because if you had a few dollars, you
could always get contact with the outside
(UNCLEAR) rather.

Q : Yes, well let's
stop and wait for the aeroplane to go.

CUT

Q : Just wait till I've finished speaking. Okay.

Q : Can I stop you there.
Can you start the story from one day we were
working at the convalescent home.

MILA : One day we were working at the convalescant home outside of the ghetto. Where the German soldiers were brought for a recuperation period, I suppose so. From the front. And after the day's work, usually they took us on the busses and brought us to the gates of the ghetto. That evening they said you're not going back for the night we need you early in the morning to start or something. We had a feeling our whole group, that something was happening, but we couldn't ask any questions. The next day we worked all day and about the time of you know, when the work ended, they brought us back to the ghetto. The ghetto was half empty. They rounded up the people, they took out the sick, the children, the people who didn't have work permits, mothers and the children, we couldn't find half of *Paldek's* family. Everybody was gone. So this was the these things happened and it was becoming worse and worse and worse. Every day. Um, people were not hungry because I think you could manage to buy maybe not the luxuries, but the bare necessities of life, we did it. ~~And so we still because afterwards when we~~ came to *Plaszów* and Auschwitz we realise how much worse the conditions were over there.

Q : Okay, do you want to take a glass of water Mila, just to make you feel ...

Now tell me a little about conditions in *Plaszów*.

MILA : In *Plaszów* the conditions were worse, of course, than in the ghetto, because we could not live in apartments we lived on bunks in barracks which er we had a big lice problem at the beginning. So we were very

MILA (Cont'd) : busy you know taking care of that. In the summer, we had an avalanche of bed-bugs but a literal avalanche of bed-bugs. We were hungrier, we were every single day at the beginning I was going out of Plaszów to Optima factory every day, and on the gates, at the gates of, when we were coming back home, we were asking questions how many today? This was like a tragic comical joke, you know and they said, like, five to zero. Ten to zero. That means how many Goeth killed that day, you know. This was the communique we got by the gates. If some people were able to organise it, as we called outside of the camp, to bring some food, there were searchers by the gate and they had to leave everything, you know, by the gate. We were cramped. We had to give, one night they came and they told us to give everything they had as far as jewelry and money. So whoever had a little bit still left, they had to give it unless they hid it. But not so many people were so courageous because this was the death penalty for finding something like this. I gave everything I had and um then we started to work in Hadntsch's factory which was already located in, on the, in Plaszów and er were conditions also. We had night shifts for instance and we had to work at night. And again.

Q : Tell me about the day that you were rounded up to get onto the train to go to Brinnlitz as you thought.

MILA : We er were told, you see the man went to Brinnlitz and week ahead of us and we didn't know what's going to happen, but we were hoping, of course, believing in Mr Schindler absolutely we believed that very soon we will go there, so they rounded us up in

(Cont'd.)

MILA (Cont'd.): the cattle trains and we travelled, I don't know exactly how long, but I am sure that two days and one night or two nights and one day, something like this and not knowing where we are going to go, but we were sure we were going to arrive in Binnlitz and they let us out in the middle of the night. Immediately we realise it was not Binnlitz it was Auschwitz. It was the dogs and the S.S. and the terrible you know, screaming by the S.S. and round, we were being rounded up into the zone hour. They stripped us of everything, you know, and our transport, our three hundred women were not tattooed. They shaved some of the woman's heads, some they were not shaven. We were given some outlandish clothing, you know and then the three weeks of terror, hunger and misery began, this was the worst three weeks of my life, you know, I will never for get it where we still believed that Mr Schindler will get us out of there. You know, I (UNCLEAR) Our belief and our hope was um vanishing a little bit, but we still held on, held on to it.

Q : Can you tell me when you were escorted into the shower there, at Auschwitz. What you thought?

MILA : When we were escorted to the shower at the very first day, we were not sure what's going to happen. Whether the gas would come, or the water, but you see, the thing is that people were so full of hope we never, you know, the sky was all red around us, the smell was kind of different, y ou know, but we still didn't believe that those things were going on. You know, even when we were told by the Slovak women who were in Auschwitz

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MILA (Cont'd) : ... or something,
they were telling us, you're not going to
survive, well we asked if we could keep this
of our possession or that, why are you worried
about it. You're not going to live another
day. And so we weren't sure what 's going
to happen afterwards, but still we hoped that
~~everything would be alright. You know, that's~~
the optimist, the perennial optimist of the
Jews, I suppose. And er when we arrived in
Brinnalitz . . .

CUT

Q : Mila, tell me how you heard about the list.

MILA : I was working at ~~Madritsch's~~ workshops with a friend of mine who told me that there is a list being formed and by all means I should speak to my husband and try to get on that list. And my husband said, oh, come on, we will never get it, and so on, but I think that he started to talk to the people at the administration and he was quite well known, he was from Krakow you know everybody knew my husband and maybe, I think, he talked his way in. He couldn't you know do it any other way because we had nothing, you know. We were not working for Schindler at the time, although my husband knew Schindler from the very beginning. But in ~~Paszow~~ we worked somewhere else, we did not work at ~~Emalia~~. but we were taken in, so it was almost a miracle.

Q ; What did your friend, what had ~~Lutek~~ Feigenbaum

Q : Mila, why did ~~Lutek~~ say it was important for you to get onto this, and if you can start the story again, I was working at ~~Madritsch's~~. Tell me the same story, don't worry about how you got on the list. Tell me about how you've heard about it and why it was important to go on the list.

MILA : I heard about Schindler's list from a very good friend of mine ~~Lutek~~ Feigenbaum. And he told me it's very important that we get the Schindler list is being formed and it's extremely important because this is a list as he put it, for life, you know. That we will go to another camp in ~~Sudetenland~~ and we were going to be working there and knowing Mr. Schindler,

MILA (Cont'd) : by reputation, and by his treatment of workers and the conditions which he created for his workers, we knew that this is our chance. You know. My husband started to work on it. He probably persuaded some people at the administration that it would, we should get on it, or we got on it.

Q : Your husband knew Mr Schindler from quite early in the war. Did you ever talk to Poldak about Schindler and so on?

MILA : Oh we talked constantly because he was such an unusual man that the whole family fell in love with him so to speak, immediately. He approached, he came to my mother-in-law's apartment in which we also stayed because even in those days we had to share an apartment. My mother and his parents and so on, and he engaged my mother-in-law into some interior, that means she was making curtains for him and so on, because this was her profession. In the meantime, my husband was the one who always delivered the things that were being made. And he gave my husband certain assignments, you know. We couldn't go to the store and buy things. There was no stores any more. You couldn't buy it, so my husband got somethings and brought it to his apartment for which Mr Schindler paid him and let's say the commission my husband made a commission on it.

CUT

Q : Mila, um, when you were in Auschwitz, describe for me a little bit the experience of being a prisoner in Auschwitz, living next to the gas ovens.

MILA : Well, it was a constant nightmare from the very beginning. We were herded first in zone, stripped of everything.

Q : I think the word's a shower in English, isn't it?

MILA : We called it a zonal.

Q : Yeah, well if you could say the showers. If you could start right from the beginning again.

MILA : Okay, when we arrived in Auschwitz, we were herded right away into the showers before the showers, we were stripped of everything. Some of the ladies were shaven, some were not. We were given, first of all, first, from the very beginning, we realise in Auschwitz that everything was meant for death, not for life. You know, there were no, there was no soap. There was no glass in the windows. There, the water, of course, was freezing cold. This was November in Auschwitz, you know. We were given the so called Dutch shoes, the wooden clogs you know, and the mud was up to our mid-calves, and you know, you were walking in those wooden clogs and we, the clogs remained in the mud and we continued walking. You know, we had no stockings, of course, no underwear of any kind. No sanitary conditions of any kind. Absolutely not. No toilet paper, no, nothing that a woman let's say needs for her sanitary condition. And we began to be very, very

MILA (Cont'd.) : we couldn't even eat what we've got because we all developed dysintery, so for instance to illustrate the conditions, like, let's say, of course during the day we walked to the latrine. Not always making it on time, but let's say at night, I had an experience like this, when I got off my bunk and I walked during the night, you couldn't go to the latrine, so there was a big, big pail there. I walked to the pail and with my luck, the pail was full, and the lady who was in charge of the pail say you cannot you know, you have to take that pail with the next one who is going to get up before of course, it's too late, you know, and he will have no possibility of even washing yourself well, and so on. Then there were constant role calls. Constant terror from the women guards and the S.S., but mostly women guards because they were in the immediate proximity of us. During the role-calls, we were supporting each other, because some of us were ready to collapse, you see, and we were staying on role-call for hours. We were putting, we were taking little beads that we had in the soup and putting it, instead of rouge on our cheeks, because when they did make a selection, they based it on the physical appearance of a person. So, if you were a little too pale or too weak looking, they took you out. Luckily, from our transport, the three hundred Schindler women I think that they took out at the very beginning, only two older ladies from which I think one made it back and we were preserved as a whole group together. We slept I think about thirteen to the bunk. I don't know how we did it. But we did it. You know, with one directions. We didn't know what tomorrow would bring. We saw the other women who are even worse than us because they were

MILA (Cont'd.) : longer. We were I will never forget the experience that's constantly in my mind when one time, I don't know why, but probably I was sent with another one of two girls to bring the so-called cereal. You know, the cream of, you know whatever, you know the porridge or whatever, to which was really water, hot water, and as we were walking with that from the kitchen to our barrack, there were like um shadows of women appeared because it was like four o'clock in the morning, with shaven heads already dressed in these tattered clothes of Auschwitz and they put their bowls that they had, which they probably used for other purposes also, into our cereal and grabbed it on the way, as we were carrying it, they were so terribly hungry. They had no control of their actions of their emotions or nothing. And we were thinking, my God, are we going to become like that. YOU know. That's one of the most terrifying experiences and a total feeling of hopelessness because we didn't or we hoped that Schindler would get us out. But how could we be sure? You know.

Q : Could you describe for me, if you remember it, and it may be difficult for you, the smell, because the way the Schindler women were kept were right next to the gas ovens, weren't they?

MILA : It was, we could not, I could not define the smell. We knew there was, it was a bad smell coming out. The sky would impress me more than the smell would. Not impress me, but would attracted our attention more was the sky, which was forever red. You know. I was still, I don't know, I am speaking about myself and maybe a few women immediately my closest friends, we didn't believe

(Cont'd.)

1 MILA (Cont'd.) : it was being happen.
It was happening around us. Even though we
saw this, we thought , how, because there
is no passage in history which can show us
that something like this could happen, that's
why, maybe, we didn't believe it. Even though
we were told around by the fellow prisoners
that it's happening. We were not believing
it. When we came to Brinnlitz, I'm jumping a
little bit ahead of me, and we got up from
the train and we knew it was Brinnlitz of course,
because.

CUT

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Q : Mila, I want to ask you about your arrival at Binnlitz. And start it from when we arrived at Binnlitz.

MILA : Okay. When we arrived at Binnlitz if I remember correctly, it was very early in the morning and it was cold and it was grey. And of course, when we got out of the cattle trains, completely dirty, and besides this, we were smeared of paint, you know, because they smeared us with paint before we left Auschwitz, so in case somebody intended to escape, would be easily spotted, you know, on the way. So we arrived and we got off the train and we formed the fives, you know, as usual. We did, I always had the same five women, you know, together, and one of my girlfriends said you know, look at the chimneys. We came here and they're going to gas us. And her name was Margo. Then I said Margo, you know they could have done it in Auschwitz. We are now coming to Schindler, I am sure they won't do it. So they marched us to the side of the camp and the gates were open and we walked in and Schindler was standing there in his little Tyrolean hat with the feather and he was surrounded by S.S. officers, guards and women guards and he smiled at us and greeted us and says, look finally you are with me. And don't worry. Now you are safe, you don't have to worry and saying, some making a statement like this after all it was six months before the war ended. No-one knew when it will end. This took some courage out of his, on his part, to make a statement like this in front of these Germans. Then I notice because the building in which the camp it was really a factory building, the factory, as I realised later, was downstairs

MILA (Cont'd.) : ... there was a balcony running along the front of the entire building and I noticed a few men standing in the striped uniforms of ~~Gross-lager~~ which they didn't wear in Plaszow yet, having their heads shaven with a little, with what we called a lice promenade. You know. And I saw my husband and of course, you know, seeing him and all the other ladies seeing some of their family, it was really total and Mr Schindler said, now go to the factory hall ^{the soup} and the bread is prepared for you. Even though the factory wasn't finished yet. I mean, our sleeping quarters we slept on straw on the floor, it didn't matter. Because we knew with him and we knew that from that time on, providing something unforeseeable would happen, we are safe, because if it were in his power and his ... he would take care of us.

CUT

Q : Mila, tell me about when you saw, y ou were in the factory, just outside the factory, there was Schindler with his little hat on, and you saw your husband after you'd spent three weeks in Auschwitz.

MILA : I saw my husband all of a sudden, along with a few other men who were standing on the balcony above and you know, our hearts were so full and so full of gratitude towards Schindler, you know, our husbands looked differently than they looked in Plaszow because they were wearing already the striped uniforms of Gross-Rosen and their heads were kind of shaven with the lice promenade in the middle and we really, realised that, and my husband woke up terribly upset as he told me later, because all of us were painted with the red paint, so he thought that we are hurt from far away, you know. He didn't realise what it was. But then we, in the night, we had a kind of a reunion in the factory hall because Mr Schindler said the soup is prepared and the bread, so please go in and feel at home. So we went in and my husband had a present for me. He had a mirror and a needle that he made by himself and he made also a toothbrush out of some horses hair or something, which I shared later with my bunk mate, you know. For the entire six months, we shared that toothbrush. And um we had to sleep on the floor on the straw, um on the straw which didn't matter at all. You know, the showers were not quite finished, but our people, the men, you know, built it and it was just wonderful you know, and we could communicate with our men, either through the partitioning the balcony, which divided our, the men's quarters from the ladies quarters and this was like our telephone. We were standing there,

MILA (Cont'd.) : ... the men on one side, the ladies on the other side and we were speaking all through the latrine, the men got some access to ladies latrine and we were calling at the ladies too.

Q : You had been in the worst concentration camp probably in the history of the war, Auschwitz. Can you compare for me, the one concentration camp, Auschwitz and the other concentration camp, *Brimlitz* by saying I have been in Auschwitz and it was the worst concentration camp. Now I was in a different concentration camp.

MILA : Well the contract between Auschwitz and *Brimlitz* was so tremendous that, you know, Auschwitz was a nightmare of everyone's life. I don't know who went to Aschwitz. If we wouldn't be taken out, saved by Mr Schindler, I don't think, personally, I or many, many others wouldn't have survived. It was the hell, the pure literal hell. When we came to *Brimlitz*, there was hope again. Of course, we were hungry and we were getting hungry by the day, but we were not afraid. We knew Mr Schindler even if the women guards were yelling at us or sometimes hits somebody, but there was no torcher, there was no selection. He did not allow any outside Germans to, he watched over us like a guardian angel. And even though we were very hungry in *Brimlitz* at the very, but we didn't care any more. You know, we knew this is war, we have to go through with it and somehow, thanks to Mr Schindler, it was like, what I call Palm Springs of the war. You know, that's how I called it.

Q : Mila, you were described as a metal worker, on the Schindler list. If you would start that by saying I was just on the list as a metal worker.

MILA : Okay. I was described on the list as a metal worker, because probably Mr Schindler couldn't get us on the list if we was, because supposedly we were supposedly essential to the war effort, but of course, there was no metal workers, worker, most of the women were not metal workers, none of them as a matter of fact. When we came, we were given our work consisted of cleaning up, I think you call it shells. Which we did for ever. I don't think what the production was as I understand there was zero production and sometimes our shells were considered defective. So Mr Schindler had to buy from another factory some other shells and give sent away as the perfect ones. So, really, we were inexperienced we didn't care. If we did a bad job, as a matter of fact, we wanted to sabotage if we could, you know. Without detection. So, I was described as a metal worker, but I was not.

Q : Mila, tell me about liberation, the last day of the war, what you felt when Schindler left.

MILA : When Schindler left, we all felt very sad because it was kind of a vacuum, you know, the Germans left, the Russians didn't arrive yet. But we were delighted and so excited about the end of the war, but quite frankly, we didn't know what's going to happen next. The German troops were still retreating and we were

MILA (Cont'd.) : ... afraid and we were told by Mr Schindler to be careful because if we would have gone beyond the gates of, who knows what the reaction of the retreating German troupes would be. You know. And in our camp, there was a big, like a hill, in front of our camp and we always dreamt during the free moments of our life in camp, what are we going to do when the war will be over and we always dreamt we're going to go on the other side and see what's life is. Then the, I think the next day after Mr Schindler left, I think this was the eighth of May, the actual day of liberation, I think the whole world around us was liberated already, except us. We saw a small man, a Russian soldier with rags on his legs and instead of shoes and tied with ropes, he came on a horse and of course the excitement and the ecstasy was total, we were kissing his legs and his hands and everything. You know, we were so happy to be free and then, in the next few days, we ventured already outside, and we went to the villa to a people, the Czechs, who were wonderful to us. As a matter of fact, I think they started to already come to the camp, bring us some food, you know and so on. The population of that town around us, near the (NAME) and (NAME) a little further, was mostly German, but there were Czechs there and the Czechs were wonderful.

CUT