

THE BESS BOAS-KOBYMAN

Q: The first thing that I'd like you to tell me about is when the Germans attacked Holland in May 1940 where were you and what was the reaction of your family when you realised that they'd attacked Holland

A: The reaction of my family was quite ..... my oldest brother he knows a lot about politics, but my parents and the rest of the family didn't know so much, we, you know, there was not television then, they simply heard from Germany they didn't believe - they didn't like even the Jewish people coming from Germany because the things they told us were so horrible and we didn't like them, do you know why? We were not rich at all and they, they, it was, they had better houses than we had admittedly they came to Holland with money and for instance in the (name....) Street and they're all living inbetween rich people. Well kind of what they tell us about Germans. I remember that I thought - I believe, I wouldn't have liked it myself. It sounds crazy then but well we were not so very alarmed we didn't believe all the things they said. My brother, I mean Eddie the oldest one, er came to our house and in the days the war started and he said come with me to let's try to escape and I remember that my mother said 'I must wait for the man who brings the laundry what would you want me to escape ~~me~~ from I want to stay in my house and you have to do with politics not me'. What should the Germans do to me - you - even you were always fighting this war in the street about something, I/don't understand" (faint not clear)

I think the alarm started when Jewish people were had you know their card with the J in it (not clear) you know

Q: Yeah can you explain to me about the J in the identity card can you tell us about that

A: That's the first time they marked you, you had your identity card, you had to carry it with you and the special was about a J in it and then you ~~saw~~<sup>felt</sup> for the first time the difference, you were marked because anybody could ask for the card and then the J

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was in it because the first really alarming thing we thought in our house later on when we then you had - then you worked and everybody was working in the war was working for the Germans. They got you (DUTCH) I don't know the English word for it

Stamp

A:

Stamp in the card and that was a German stamp and it said (DUTCH/GERMAN.....) that meant you're safe but not forever. How can I explain it in English? Until later that is maybe the best word but until later even want - didn't want to see that until later then the war should be over. You were absolutely sure it was a war for months or the American or the Russian, not the Russians at that time, the American or the English people would come and then we were safe again when the war was over. We didn't believe in a long war at all. We only had to try to get this stamp in= our identity card it was the first thing because you

cut.....

Actually the thing that I wanted you to tell us first you said that you needed to get a stamp in the identity card saying that you're okay until later but if you didn't have that, I mean what did you think was happening to people who were not okay until later?

A: Not exactly that we saw thought of anything real danger but the only safe certain feeling was that (not clear) if you had nothing at all but a J well you see that it's - it was such a dirty game - feeling of safety it was only a piece of paper and it was nothing at all, it was the only thing thing you had, you could wait another day you didn't know exactly what was, what was in front of us, we only lived by day, honestly by day and I remember we had one, I mean the brothers, my brothers and myself but my parents you know my father he was a worker for his own and then you didn't get such a thing and of course it sort of troubled us the most to feel the same balance ..... to have together, now I have the feeling we were only safe and not my parents because that was the thing that troubled us and

Q: Can you tell me what you did to try and - say what your brother did to try and get your parents safe as well

A: Yes it was by accident that my brother - one day so sure that he could go to the Gestapo and ask for a stamp but because one day you see it forbidden for Jewish people to go to the movies to go to the park to go to anything but my brother discovered that it was for a long time possible to rent a boat and do some sailing on the (RIVER) and that was not forbidden for Jews I think ...water and you could ..... your whole family if you wanted it but my brother discovered that he could rent a boat and one Saturday when he was in the (River) again another boat capsized and a boy a little boy fell in the water and immediately my brother jumped after the boy and brought it out and it was the son of a fascist living in our street and the mother of that little boy was'nt very very thankful to get Jewish boy who saved her only child and she said, she said to him if I ever can do something for you young man you come to my house and he went away but he was not yet down ..... immediately he went back and he he said you said something may be I can use that please write me a note that I saved

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206 take 1 cont

said  
your son that's the only thing I ask you. She/oh yes I'll do that for you and I remember her letter which (not clear) that boy saved her only child. With German greeting Hi Hitler she wrote under that letter and this little ..... note from a ..... he went to the Gestapo he said show me please the head of the Gestapo immediately. There was a star on his coat it was so crazy but he was so, he was so scared for his parents he didn't realise he was in pure danger, yes came a man, he said ~~what~~ what do you want. He said this, I have this letter, I just saved the German child please can you give me only the mark for my parents. It ~~x~~ is all what I ask. And the man said no, I can't give you that, but if you're ever - then your family - this um

Q: Yeah when you're taking away

A: When you take away the house and you are brought to the..... theatre the point where all Jewish people are brought I am there, you ask for me and that was the only thing he got and he came home and he told my mother what he did. And I remember my mother she was so mad at him. She hit him she said you're crazy (not clear) why did you do that for now they know your address and may be they're coming tomorrow. She didn't realise they had all the addresses and then one day we were actually at home all of us and were brought to the theatre and the man/<sup>was not there,</sup> but we must wait the whole night for transport I don't know why. And at five o'clock in the morning I see my brother was ..... standing near the door. The whole family Koupman was called on the stage the boy had nothing to do with the ..... anymore there were tables, there were people writing things and there were sacks and there was - it was terrible but then there was a man looking at us, looking - is that your family, all right you can go home all of you. And this was really unbelievable to walk on the street again at 6 o'clock in the morning to be free again but the first time we were, now we were absolutely safe, we were in their hands and they sent us home, we were tired as we never went to bed and my mother made coffee and - they hauled us/<sup>from our house</sup> do you know how many times, 11 times they played that game of cat and mice with us. We know exactly how

it runs and the man came he sent us home. The last time it was  
This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word. It is not the primary source, and it has not been checked for spelling or accuracy.

(NAME .....)

I think he is one of three who was sitting .

286 take 1 cont

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said it was not long enough er all that game ten times, 11 times for only one child, the whole family Kouprman must go to .....NAME now (not clear) there we stayed together for four weeks and then my parents and my youngest brother had to leave us on transport

Q: Can you tell me um after you had been in (NAME) can you tell me what ~~happ~~ happened after that, you were taken to Germany yourself

A: Yes I stayed for a long time in (NAME) till the last Jewish prisoners are staying..... me and er well you see Maurice the boy who tried to save us which was terrible. My parats after four weeks but he after nine months we stayed together and he took care of me like my father should have done or my husband. I had not a husband at the time but it was touching the way he tried to take care of his sister, he worked in the night (not clear) to (not clear) for other prisoners just to get a little bit more food, and it was dreadful food for his sister and after nine months he had to go and I should have gone with him but it was not allowed because I had (DUTCH) I don't know Scarlet Fever, I had that and that's one of the dirty thing of the Germans then you were sick you couldn't go to the gas chambers, firs you had <sup>to recover, they</sup> gave you the illusio nothing happened because they don't send you on a transport ~~like~~ when you are sick so I had to , my brother he came to say goodbye to me and I was looking at him and I was thinking for heaven sake he can't go not in this poor clothes and he was small you see and I gave him one of my jackets and I was thinking it's starting the other way round ..... and I gave him a pair of my boots and er I looked at him when he walked away from the ..... to his bed and on his bed he looked like me, sure I'd never see him again. So sure.

Q: After he'd gone you were then for another month in (NAME) and then you were put onto transport as well is that correct, can you remember the circumstances in which they put u you on - did they call you all out and put you into a cattle train or what did they do

A: No they they um they put us yes in a car where they put cows in how do you say a trailer yes. The lot of us together and

200 take 1 cont

er take a long time the trip took a long time and I remember one old woman who she wanted to get out and she asked for water and we smiled because we didn't believe that they brought us water or anything - what they do to with us we were not sure, not I didn't believe it up till the last moment I didn't believe they would do anything of real danger to us but er after 90 I think 90 hours travelling we came to A..... we heard a the word A..... before and I expected to see part of the family anyhow, I had a big family 70 peoples and I was hoping may be somebody is there and if they are not in there may be in another camp I don't know but I remember when we arrived in A..... I saw prisoners from Amsterdam I know their faces but I was afraid then for the first time you know why there were flames up to the sky and a strange smell - smell I remember from home then my mother burns on Friday a chicken - terrible it was awful

15 30

cut.....



Q: Can you just go back a bit - can you describe um... what you remember of your arrival at Ausw....when you first got there.

A: What I felt or what I saw?

Q: Both what you felt and what you saw.

A: Yeah...I felt that er..every scared mostly I told you about this fire...which I would hardly believe it was a Fabrik to work in. It was....never saw such a fire before, but even then I couldn't believe it was the killing....no not that but I was scared like a dog was scared in a burning house I simply had very primitive scared feeling I had. It's er... I remember there was a man from Holland and he said between his teeth "no sick people", no sick people", see? And we were hidden there for the first time real...without reason at all we would be marched - even the sick girls were...actuall with us ..there was dogs<sup>who</sup>were biting, the dogs were biting us and were hitten with whips and we brought to a sort of bath house, it was not really a bath house it was a .....it was, and then we must put out our clothes all of us and er.....it had nothing to do with the crematorium the.....<sup>wor</sup>crematorium I head there for the first time but we had to stand naked simply naked standing for twenty four hours there. And I.... I didn't know if they were to feed us I remember that came little girl in which was from F.....as well, but she was dressed like a little SS woman in boots and green outfit and er...whip and we said look, look, this girl she's from F.....and she said hello you are from F.....all of you? You go to gas chambers - they sent my parents to the gas chambers as well. She was not touched at all she only said it the way I said it now. She was the little SS woman, and you know what happened to that girl she was a little beautiful girl and one of the SS woman took her and like a little daughter- I don't know why and...and...and built a little SS woman out of her and she was describing us from the gas chambers and I said WHISPERS....she's made NOT CLEAR....I didn't know she was NOT CLEAR....but it was some woman....we were frightened - immediately knew what wqs happening there - I ...maybe I was stupid I don't know... I didn't believe a thing like that, And er....we had worked in F.....for Philips you see, and that was I think the only reason they didn't kill us immediately,because that's what they did with pople. The whole trains who came to Ausw.....then immediately to the crmmatorium not the chamber I were in because all these girls had worked for Phillips and we were important for them and they sent us to....

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word. It is not the primary source, and it has not been checked for spelling or accuracy. out from Ausw.....

Q: We stayed only five days - they cuts our hair not quite only short, not shaven like we saw other prisoners. The first time I saw a woman shaven like a man I didn't even believe it was a woman - it's horrible and I saw for the first time real...real hunger, because when they gave bread the other prisoners who were a long time already there were like lions and they..... we were not really hungry then. We had food in...it. that's not excellent food of course not as prisoners for Jewish prisoners it was not er....but we had not real hunger. Then I felt for the first time really fighting for a piece of bread and er... Well they marked us they gave us a mark in our arm that was what they did and I remember that I was thinking er...I was trying to get the blood away and it was the reason I took a little ink away and that's the reason there's a little - not a good thing to see - anyhow er..it doesn't matter. We were taken out by Ausw.....the important girls, and they send us to Tele..... and there we have to do work for their....something I...I don't know what they let us do, it had to do with the war industry I...I er...thought we had to work in a Fabrik.....from and during the night, they send us at 7 o'clock to the Fabrik and we came out 7 o'clock in the morning. Er.....surrounded all the time by the SS and their dogs, but inbetween hours they were all normal, civil workers and um....some of them were really didn't believe their eyes. I remember a man who...who put his hand on my shoulder and I....he said for heavens sake I didn't do is it true what they tell about Ausw.....? And I...I only er.....I only was thinking - don't say a word and I didn't..I gave him not an answer at all. We work in the Fabrik and it was er....it was bearable the food we'd get was lousy but anyhow we...we had seen Ausw.....and we were very happy not to be there any more, and maybe it was for us a possibility to <sup>get</sup> out of this war for slowly before the Germans getting afraid now - really afraid. We saw - they came to the Fabrik every evening to see the workers, and they had their private clothes, because they were not sure any more for bombing the fabrik and all. And I was only thinking for heavens sake I wish my mother lived and lived until she see the the...same scare from the Germans now, they were scared yes and we saw it. And...we didn't care so much.. if...we should survive or not. Yes we wanted to live of course you can't... you can't think of death when you are 19 years no...but it didn't so much because you know all these children, the prisoners around us was the only family we had, and we were alive and the Germans were scared... afraid and I think it was the main...the most important thing. And then they bombed the fabrik and um...we were not allowed of course not to go any more/<sup>they</sup>er....

A: ...we had to stand in the L.....they called it

Q: Can I send you back...can I send you back to the Ausw....for a moment...

A: Yes...not now....CHUCKLES

Q: Can you describe again the...you said and I think that possibly I didn't get it on film, you said that you saw the flames coming into the sky and you described the smell - can you just tell me about that again 'cos I'm worried that I might not have got that before we ran out before.

A: When I came to Ausw....I saw the flames you mean= that part, yes?

Q: Yes...

A: I was afraid yes and I don't know why but I did not see people thrown into the fire, I was only from...like a dog in a burning house is afraid - I was afraid, because mostly of the smell which was a terrible sweet smell of...it had something to do with burning hair and a burning chicken, I...I only know that I was thinking they are burning chickens I didn't know the chickens were people and er.....when we arrived it= was the 6th June and I remember one...one of the prisoners spoke to me....you have bad luck because the English arrived in France - didn't they? I don't know exactly when. And er....you go out to the crematorium, that's all what he said, and I was again thinking crematorium what's exactly a crematorium. And I asked her what do you mean crematorium she said look, and= then she pointed to flames, you are going through the....through the...what is it....through the chimney that's where you'll go through, and I was still .....but now.

Q: Why did....you survived this - why would you say you survived?

A: Why?

Q: Did you believe that you were going to die or did you...

Q: Why not?

A: I don't know, I don't know...I'd never believe they'd send me through the fire - no no. I can't tell you I get a feeling for my.....either I'm crazy or.....I don't know. If they had sent for us immediately I couldn't be an optimist you see but they sent us two times twenty four hours they let us stand naked and in that twenty four hours I never believed they.....they'd send us - no; then they should have done it immediately.

Q: Yeah...the next thing that I want to talk about is um....the cutting of your hair I think...

CUT...

Q: Can you tell me perhaps what your own experience was of in fact the march.

A: My own experience?

Q: Yes...what made you...gave you the order and what it was like on that march...

A: I...I remember that we were walking with two girls on this die - five in a row - yes? A long long row of prisoners. And I was er...when I remember my row, yeah? I remembered that I must look always look to the girls walking in front of me, she er...had kind of wooden shoes, not the real wooden Dutch shoes but it was only the bottom was wood and it and she had no stockings at all, and she was walking in the snow, and the snow goes under the wooden shoes and hang on that wood and it was as if she was walking on....like children on..I don't

Q: ...silk...

A: Yeah yeah...and the shoe broke off and she walked with her bare leg and I couldn't keep my eyes off these legs...well I did... I only had this strong feeling - on on and go on and don't fall down because if you fall down you saw prisoners who were shot - if you fell down you got a shot and I said don't look just look straight for you and I was starting to tell old movies and girls near me listened to me, I remember all...all kinds of movies and I was thinking keep turning, keep turning and don't drop - it was the only thing I was thinking about - this and the heels of the girl before me.....I remember very very good. And we walked...we marched twentykilometre a day - the first day they brought us to a horse stable somewhere - it was dreadfully cold and smelly of horses but I think we smelt of horses as well. And er...we did have a sleep and the next day we had to march again - there was no food there was nothing. Only marching from one camp to the other and we came to a number of camps to.....Belsen ...they didn't let us in, they was not a place but er...they gave us food rthere I remember getting a kind of sausage - for me after when I survived and I heard a sound of B.....and bells and I always remember this piece of meat I get - for me it was a good concentration camp now it wasn't, but in my opinion it was not bad at all. There I remember from the march.... and movies, and frozen prisoners and er...poor bare feet of the girl in front of me, and me telling stories...stories..stories - this I remember.

Q: Can you tell me about when they cut your hair?

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At Yes.....they cut my hair it was OK....

NOT CLEAR

near the concentration camp it was in the neighbourhood  
 from Hamburg - it was not real concentration camp it was a barrack.

NOT CLEAR

That wonderful word in English language over.....

and it was sadists I never saw them like that in my life. You see he had a whip  
 which he hid in his arm and on a little ladder bent around his middle finger  
 it was like er...NOT CLEAR....

and he hit you even.....without to make face he hit it...and er  
 we were absolutely sure the war would be over now, because the Germans  
 tell us when we lose you will lose your.....

and the words "when we lose the ", for heaven sakes they were thinking  
 of losing the war and er...that makes us sure.....we heard the sound of guns  
 and you heard bombs and one on our train tumbles and I never understood why they  
 put us on train again. They kept us like diamonds, they were..I don't know  
 why one of the mysteries of the Germans - I don't know. But we were in the last  
 tenth - three days before we were free one of the....one of the um...woman  
 SS picked out three girls - I was one of the lucky girls and they let us clean  
 her room and I...I...I was...and we had to empty the locker and in the middle  
 of a little um....how do you call it...like suusage, yes? There was a piece  
 of meat and...and....they called it s.....and it was there in the locker...and  
 you must...we had not had eat for days and we were very dying from hunger, and I  
 was the first honestly I was the first who started er...to put my finger in the  
 s.....I think I licked until here.....and all the other ones make mark...  
 and it makes mark in it you see we didn't dare to touch the meat honestly, but  
 we couldn't stay away from this fat and then that SS girl tentored and with  
 her was a and she made a beautiful performance because a man  
 was in the neighbourhood and she said, oh look ".....SPEAKS GERMAN....."  
 that means the Dutch pigs eat my meat and I was....I said "I wish it was  
 true", she said NOT CLEAR.....dare to touch the meat.....NOT CLEAR  
 and go and stand on the wall and I was thinking for heaven's sake they're  
 losing thewar and now they're going to shoot us - only...only for....I was  
 scared then they said no....I don't make my hands dirty but your hair goes  
 down....and maybe it was for me better than they shoot me, because you  
 see we had nothing left and I understood hair - not it's not so  
 very good.

year, and we were dirty we had louses we had sickness, but we had our hair. I was thinking when I go out of the concentration camp I'd go and sit in the water for twenty four hours, and go to a hairdressers and I go..... I'd be a little bit of a woman again. And my....I was never a pretty woman believe me - I only had beautiful hair - thick and red and curling and.... and...now they say they're going to take away my hair, and <sup>ONE</sup> girl had to cut. ....we had to stay on the in the evening and the three victims had to come out. And er....one girl it was...crying she was one of our girls had to cut my hair and she....and I was always whispering to her... not so short...not so short....and....NOT CLEAR

he said er...you want to be er....a hair cut like a gentleman let me do it for you, and then he cut my hair completely, and....I couldn't speak a word after it....I think I was broken....if they had to do it to me before I didn't survive - it's idiot to think about it that hair is growing but for me the war it didn't need to end for me, it was over, because I had not a feeling of a person any more. Later on when I was free and was in a hospital in Sweden I only asked for a piece of hair which was impossible the, now you have hair pieces all over, but then it was....they didn't even know what you were talking about.

Q: Can you remember um....when you...the day it was over that you were free.

A: Yes I was in a train - we were brought to freedom in a train with not those SS people, but with soldiers yes but other soldiers - old man.....germans....

Q: Did you know that it was the end of the war?

A: They told us - you are lucky you go to Sweden Hitler is dead, and I remember one of our girls who said "Hitler is dead I'll see my daughter again" - she never had told us during all the years she had a daughter, er....we were free ...in the train over ....we'd been over we were free we couldn't believe it until we saw <sup>for</sup> the first time ~~was~~ of our life English soldiers ...we knew....we knew immediately they were English soldiers because you see we were used to the dreadful green uniform poor...because the Germans had not a real uniform and...and of the war anymore, but these English soldiers standing waiting for us were so perfectly dressed. Yes then I know we were in Denmark it was for Denmark and the people from Denmark were running to the trains with bread and cigarettes and...and...  
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SLATE 26B SLATE 1 cont.

A:                   ....I remember that one woman took out her lovely white shoes and gave it to me, but I had feet like this, I took the shoes of course in my hands.....I couldn't...my feet were NOT CLEAR.. and I was sick but I....I like to say...I came out of war with a pair of white shoes.....

cont....