

Mr. Hoffman, reel 1. When were you born?

I was born in 1929.

And whereabouts did you live?

We lived in Prague.

And what did your family do?

My father was in wholesale provision business.

What sort of neighborhood did you live in?

It was quite a-- nothing special, but it was in one of the center-- in the center of the city. Well, there was--

Was it a working class area, do you think, or a middle class area, would you say?

I would think-- I can't remember exactly, but I should think middle class-- upper middle class.

So your parents were fairly prosperous, were they?

Fairly prosperous, yes.

What sort of education did you have?

I had not a great deal of education because when I remember-- when I was extremely young, I was not in very good health. And at the time, I was sent to a sanatorium, which was in Sudetenland, in Bohmen. And this is-- in fact, most of the other children were all German there. And I got on extremely well with all of them-- I spoke-- as I spoke German myself. And of course, my German improved.

But I was only about six years old at the time. And I got on extremely well with all the other children at that sanatorium. And eventually, when I came back to Prague, the doctor suggested that the air in Prague is not exactly the best for my health.

So my family decided to send me to the Carpathians, where they thought the air would be better. And I could stay with relatives there. And this is how I came to be separated from my family. And what happened afterwards is, you see, that about a year afterwards, they sent my-- I had my-- my family was two brothers and two sisters. So my mother and father sent my little brother to be with me. So he joined me there, also, in the Carpathians.

How old were you when you went to the Carpathians?

Well, I think I was probably about-- not eight yet, just under eight. And when my brother came, that was probably a year later. And he was about three and a half years younger than me. So he would have been approximately just not quite six yet.

Were your family aware of the events going on in Germany after 1930?

Well, in fact, we were all aware of what was happening. Even as a young boy, I remember quite often, my father used to have parties, card parties. And they used to-- people used to come around, and have some drinks, and play cards. And afterwards, the discussion was always on politics. And I was very keenly interested.

And I was only about seven years old. I used to stay up late and listening to all what was going on, sometimes making

some comments myself, which amused quite a few people. I mean, I used to make suggestions.

And I remember clearly, there used to be an argument where somebody said, no, they could-- the English are so strong, they'll put an end to them. And others said, the French are-- they're going to not going to allow them to do that. And I think the things that I remember-- I think, which nobody really quite expected that they would have quite such a walkover.

Because the impression that most people got was that it was a lot of filibuster and boasting, that-- you see, that anytime the English and French wanted to put a stop to him, they would have no great difficulty in doing it. And of course, that was-- there was always a difference of opinion. Some of them were resigned and felt like the best thing would be to get away because things were going to get worse.

Others thought, we've got to weather the storm. We've got to hope. We've got to wait till it blows over. You see, again, that-- you see, people usually with a great stake-- I didn't know exactly how many families who were well-established were very reluctant to uproot themselves, since, you see, it was always, obviously, difficult to transfer their wealth or whatever to other countries. And it would mean a great sacrifice. So they were hoping against hope that it will-- it will not be as bad as some people feared.

Did your family consider moving?

I can't actually know about that because I never actually heard them. But what I know afterwards, from what I spoke to one of my uncles, my father seriously considered moving. However, his brother persuaded him not to. He pointed out to him that he would have to go to a new country without knowing the language. And he would have to struggle to start over again. Whereas here, he is a well-established and successful businessman. And it would be very difficult, in any case.

You see, he always felt that it would be-- the well-off would not be as badly off in any way, you see, because you've always felt like, all right, if you're poor, you'll have to suffer much more. But if you've got money, you'll be able to survive somehow or other. Even if you lose most of your fortune, you'll still be able to survive, to start again. But if you move to another country, you really got to start completely from scratch, without even knowing the language as well, you see. So it would have been great difficulty for him.

When you were in the Carpathians, what sort of community were you living in?

Well, the community was-- it was a quite strongly Orthodox Jewish community, where religion played the most important part in the life of most of them. And I-- although we-- you see, the community was divided between Jewish and Russian Christians. The two communities got on very well together.

But since, you see, the Christians used to do all the farming and things like that, and used to-- and the Jews had the businesses, the shops, and other things-- and my uncle and my grandfather both had a shop each. And they used to buy a lot of the products from the farmers and used to process them, make cheese, butter, or other things, and sell them to-- export them or whatever, and also provide them with all necessities.

And you see, the buses and other thing was that the community itself was extremely religious. And it was a-- religious education was very important, although there were two sets of schools. And we went-- actually, I went to a Czech school. But the Jewish community were going to state school, Czech school. But the large-- the Christian community were mostly-- 99% went to what they call a Russian syllabus school.

And on top of that, when you finish your ordinary school, you had to have religious instructions, which were much more severe and more difficult than even the ordinary schooling. You see, consequently, it was difficult to excel or do well at both. And instinctively, I felt that if I did well at my religious studies, it would be more rewarding for me from the point of view of my grandfather and my uncle. So I was extremely good at my religious instructions and very bad at my ordinary schooling.

How do you mean it would be more rewarding for you?

Well, they would be more interested and be happy if I excelled in one of them. Then the other one wouldn't be very important from their point of view. If I did well in ordinary schooling in whatever subject, it wouldn't mean nothing. My big rewards would come if I came-- if my religious teacher came back and said, I was top of the class there. You see that if I was good there, so that would be much more rewarding for me. And somehow, without going into anything like that, I felt more that I was-- it was more important to do well in that sphere.

What did the family do that you were staying with?

Well, my grandfather had a shop. And my uncle had a shop. My uncle had a much more successful shop. In fact, my grandfather's shop was rather a loss-making venture, since he was getting he was quite old. And he had some very weird ideas. And of course, you see, his oldest son, which was my uncle, who, of course, died recently in Miami-- he survived the war. He was already a very, very wealthy man.

And my grandfather's shop was always losing money. And I remember quite often staying up late at night. And there were furious rows, since my uncle wanted to close the shop because my grandfather was extending credit to all the poor people who wanted to shop for their weekend shopping.

And he didn't-- my uncle didn't mind so much him extending credit. But he wasn't keeping any books. He said, he remembered everything. So of course, you see, if they had money, they paid. If they didn't, they didn't.

And naturally, you see, when we needed-- when he needed fresh supplies, he didn't have any money. So his son had to foot the bill. And he wasn't very pleased about it at all, you see. He was rather-- I quite often remember, late at night, there were furious rows because he wanted them to shut the shop. And of course, he refused. He was already very old, as well. He was already in his middle 70s.

What impact did the invasion of Prague have upon your life in the Carpathians?

It didn't have an immediate impact. The impact it had on you is that at the same time as the invasion of Prague, the Hungarians moved into the Carpathians. And of course, you see, we welcomed the Hungarians, not because so much that we felt that they were great liberators or whatever. They were, in fact, not a great news at all. However, compared to the Germans, we were always-- everybody was glad that the Hungarians came instead of the Germans.

Was there a strong anti-German feeling in your community at this time?

It wasn't a particularly anti-German, it was a great fear. It was a question of-- nobody actually felt any sort of hatred towards anybody. But they all felt the fear for what was happening. The speeches from Hitler and the other-- the propaganda and all these things that were pouring out were absolutely frightening. And people didn't feel, I think, a question of-- of course, there was a hatred.

Obviously, there was a-- some people felt a despair. Others felt that this thing, there were extreme religious ones probably felt this was a punishment from high up for something that we've done wrong or whatever. And there were always something, some different opinions about it. But generally, there was no feeling of hatred, especially against any people. There was a-- certainly a hatred against those people who were doing that to us.

What was your feeling?

My feeling was, you see, as a young boy, I was feeling how could I-- at times, I used to stay up late at night. And sometimes, even at night, I couldn't fall asleep. I would think, how could I help my family? How could I? How can I do something to make them-- to take them out of the danger, to take them to some safe place?

And there was no way that I could think that it can be done. Were-- all kinds of things were going through my mind. But of course, I was only nine years old. I was in-- well, I was getting on for 10 now. But I used to spend a lot of time

brooding about it and thinking.

And I just couldn't see what can be done. I couldn't see the end of it. I couldn't understand quite the reason why we were sorted out for this type of special treatment, a thing like that. It seemed-- it didn't seem-- often, it seemed very baffling, and-- the whole situation was-- we were in in. Well, just asked, why just-- especially sort it out like that.

Were you able to keep in contact with your family?

We were, up to a certain extent, you see. Because what we understood when the Nazis came into Prague, after a while, they-- there were approximately 40,000 Jewish-- Jews in Prague. And they demanded 1,000 Jews at a time for deportation. And my father was fairly influential, I understand, in the community and whatever.

And he was able to delay their own deportation up for a time. I don't know exactly. I mean, this is only what I heard second and third-hand. And we were getting letters from them, in fact. And in the last letter we had from them, where they were-- just as they were being deported to Theresienstadt, I remember, I was going to the mountains with my cousin, a girl cousin-- she was older than me.

And when we got into the-- very high up in the Carpathian Mountains, she started crying and kissing me. And she looked-- we looked over the whole plateau of the mountains. And she cried. And she said, how is it possible in such a big world that there is no place for us anywhere? You see, and as a boy, it made me think too, you see. And she was about three or four years older than me.

Did people realize where the Jewish community was being transported to at the time?

Well, there were-- the stories that were coming through were absolutely horrifying, you see, the stories that were coming through of absolute murders, and tortures, and mass killings, and all kinds of thing. That was, in fact, before the main gassing and things, you see. Because up to a certain state-- stage, most of the atrocities were being committed by what they call the Einsatzgruppen, which were special commanders who were following the German troops in and just murdering and killing in ditches and whatever.

Were you aware of that at the time?

We were because the stories were coming through quite well, you see, from there. But of course, you see, those people who were being deported from our place to those places, we knew that-- well, they supposed to be for resettlement. But we knew that they weren't coming back. But people were-- some just didn't couldn't help themselves. They didn't know what to do.

You see, what exactly happened was that even in Hungary, the first thing they did was to take all the able-bodied young men and put them in labor camps. And what was left, really, were the children, the women, and the old people. Now, it was not possible to organize any meaningful resistance under the circumstances. It was quite inconceivable and not practical in any way because you only needed a few people with guns to absolutely cause complete havoc.

In any event, you see, the-- although many people were very despondent and very-- felt like the end had come, and there was no way out, and that this was it, you see, many others were still pinning their hopes on a miracle. You see, many of the-- most-- the vast majority were still hoping against hope that God would intervene or something like-- something supernatural would happen. Either the war would come to a premature end or something, or there would be an immediate end to it, or whatever, you see.

So people don't want to know, even on our way. Whenever-- even when you're nearing the vertical, you always-- people always have some hope. They pin-- there's some hope. Something is going to come. Some rescue is-- some miraculous rescue is going to arrive and save them from the final abyss, you see. That's what usually, I feel, is quite often-- was the case.

Was that how you felt?

Well, I mean, I kept on going. I mean, I came-- I didn't feel very much after-- I was very devoted to my family. And I was extremely going through terrible depressions because I was missing my mother, and sisters, and father. And I felt that without them life was hardly worth living. So it was really not so much worried about my own survival.

So for many-- for some periods, I didn't feel terrible that I thought, well, whatever will happen will happen. It doesn't really-- it's-- life is hardly worth living now under the circumstances, since most of the things that I loved and I cared for-- also, I didn't know it at the time-- were unlikely to be there. However, you see, I still clung to some hope that they would some of them would survive.

You see, I thought. So this is one of the things that gave me the greatest strength and determination to survive. Because my hope that at least one of my family would survive-- if one of them would survive, I would-- life would still be worth living on. You see, if none of them would, I would be very depressed. But I think this was probably the main factor in giving me that feeling, that strength to continue and under most trying circumstances, no matter how difficult things were, no matter how much I was hungry, and starved, and whatever. I was still-- the great-- gave me the great determination to go on.

Whilst you were in the Carpathians, did the community life change as a result of the occupation by the Hungarians?

No, I don't think it changed to a great extent. Of course, there were shortages of various things, obviously. But you see, the-- generally, the community was quite a frugal community. It didn't go in for great luxuries. And the basic foods were if not plentiful, at least adequate, you see, because most of the food was grown locally.

But even when the Hungarians came in, the first law was to take away-- all the Jewish businesses were taken away. The Christian community would still support the Jewish community as far as food was concerned and other things. They would still supply them because most of them either had money, or if not, they gave it to them on credit and whatever. So nobody actually starved or went hungry.

Who were the businesses given to?

The businesses were invariably given to Hungarians who came over. For instance, in our place, my father-- my grandfather's shop was taken over by a Hungarian from somewhere, from Munkács or whatever. And my uncle's shop, he fortunately handed it over to a local Russian, who was supposed to be a collaborator, but in fact, he was a secret partisan. In fact, he was working against the Hungarians. He was later himself deported to the concentration camp.

But you see, if those who were willing to cooperate among the Christians were accepted as-- whereas among the Jews, you couldn't-- you-- even if you offered to cooperate with the Nazis, there was no way. They would not accept anything, you see, because even those, apparently, who were needed on very vital war effort work were still dispensed with, you see. I mean, when-- two words-- even when the war was going already badly for them and they needed every little bit of rolling stock to supply the army, apparently-- what's it called-- preference was given to-- for the-- to provide people for the death camps. They had preference, even when the question-- and it was a question of vital supplies to the front.

And you see. So I always get-- I mean, afterwards, when after, I read many things about it later on, I got the impression that Hitler's hatred for the Jews superseded all other considerations. Winning the war was only a minor consideration. His main consideration was to kill every Jew he could lay a hand on. You see, if, in the process, 50 million Germans lost their lives or whatever, it didn't worry him in the slightest. Or even if they lost the war because of that, you see, his whole-- it seemed to be his whole purpose was his determination to kill every-- or to get, well, whatever he could.

What was the reaction of your community and your family to this confiscation of property? How did they feel towards the Hungarians who had taken this?

I don't know. They didn't show any specific feeling. They weren't exactly very happy about it. But of course, there was nothing much they can do. They were happy to be left alone, to be-- you see, things-- obviously, things were worse than other things. As long as they were not-- and in any event, my grandfather and grandmother, they were quite old. And

their children had been taken away to labor camps. So they were left, really, on their own. And they would manage quite easily. They didn't have a great-- they didn't have great needs.

How did they make their living, having lost their shop?

Well, they had-- they still had some things which they could use for buying food and things like that. They didn't need a great deal. And food was very cheap in those places because any little bit of money you'd have, you could-- the local population, local Christian population would-- we would-- in fact, we had some-- quite a few-- bit of land, which was not actually-- even if it was-- we gave it away or something like that, we could grow our own things on them. Many of them-- you see, we still had a garden, which we were allowed. So all the vegetables and things like that, we could grow in the gardens.

Did your education change as a result of the occupation?

It did, in fact, because I stopped going to school altogether-- ordinary school, although I still carried on my religious education. So from then on, from the age of nine, I had no schooling, ordinary schooling, at all.

Was it through choice or was it a compulsory thing that you didn't go to school?

It wasn't-- there was no school to go to there. You see, the Hungarians didn't introduce any schooling or anything like that. I don't remember having to go or anything like that to school. When the Czechs left, that was the end of schooling. So what happened now was that I had to do-- virtually all my schooling was in religious instructions, and no other education, such as reading, and writing, or anything like that. There was no nothing available for anything like that.

Was religious life affected at all in the community?

I don't think it was in any way affected, the religious life. Religious life had been the same there for centuries. And they carried on their own there, you see, getting-- going to synagogue, and doing all the praying, and whatever. That went on the same way. There was no-- at the time, there was no real change whatsoever, not that I can remember. Of course, you see, people used to get together and talk, you see. But there wasn't a great deal of change that I noticed in that respect.

How long did you stay in the Carpathians for?

Well, I stayed there for about, I think, a couple of years before I went to Budapest.

Why did you go to Budapest?

Well, first, you see, I wanted to get away because I was not happy, you see. And also, there was some talk that there was a possibility that some-- there was still some emigration out of the Europe there. And it was a possibility that I could have got out yet. And in fact, I went there and was a prospect.

But then, of course, when I came to Budapest, I was already ill. And I was quite ill for some time until I was-- I got-- I was into-- I was walking about very, very ill. And I was only about 11 years old at the time. And eventually, I was admitted to a hospital, where I stayed for about three to four months, most of it in isolation.

Were your grandparents happy that you were going to Budapest at the age of 11?

They didn't. They weren't unhappy in any way, happy or unhappy. It didn't seem my brother was staying behind. And I was a bit sorry to leave him. But in any way, it would mean less-- one mouth less to feed. And food was not exactly plentiful. So I don't think they were absolutely worried about it in any way.

How did you plan to get out of the country, if that was your aim?

Well, there were stories that there were some possibilities of some people being-- emigrating still, despite the war. There

was still possibility of getting out, apparently, through Romania or Turkey, and reaching what was then called Palestine, as there were always some tickets available, which would be-- and in fact, some people, I understand, did get out, even during the war.

You were not able to make the contacts?

No, I wasn't because, of course, for the few tickets that were available, I suppose, there were thousands of candidates. And it was not a guarantee that I would be the one to get on.

What did you plan to do in Budapest?

Well, I didn't plan to do nothing, particularly. I was a question of surviving, you see. We-- what you did those days is you didn't plan, actually, what you were going to do because, you see, the planning would have to wait till the war was over and if you got through. Nobody was very optimistic that they would make it. But-- [AUDIO OUT]

Mr. Hoffman, reel 2. What arrangements were made for you in Budapest, if any at all?

Well, my arrangements were that, as I didn't have a proper permit and I didn't get any proper rations, I would go to various different families each day to have something to eat. And this, of course, would put less pressure than living with one family who would have to share their rations with me.

And so I was-- every day, I would go somewhere else for my meals. I was sort of-- well, there was some person there who was associated with what they called the school of-- a religious school who organized and who was in-- something to do with the synagogue and with the community. He gave me the addresses and places to go to.

So I would go. I would stay with one family. They would put me up. But of course, you see, I could go-- I would go every day to eat somewhere else. In this way, it would be less pressure on anybody too. I wasn't particularly-- I mean, I was not-- never a great, what's it called, eater. Any little bit would do. I wasn't-- this wasn't a great problem.

Food didn't seem to worry me all that much because whether it was good or bad, it didn't matter, as long as I had some food to keep on going, which was the main thing. And my expenses, I got from the Joint-- American Joint Distribution Committee. They would give me some pocket money to keep going if I needed some pocket money.

I see. And what did you use that money for?

Well, you needed fare if you want to go somewhere. Because I stayed in a place called Āšjpest, which is a New Pest. And I wanted to go to Budapest or whatever. I could actually travel quite unhindered. I was never stopped anywhere. I wanted to see some friends or whatever, I was able to travel quite unhindered through.

Did you have a permit?

I don't exactly remember. But I must have had something. Somebody must have given me some permit, in case I was stopped. I don't actually remember using it because I can't actually remember being stopped. I never went in any sort of areas which weren't permitted to go in anyway. I kept well out of those places.

What areas were you not permitted to go in?

Well, I suppose there must have been some military installations and places like that. Although, often, when I went from Āšjpest to Budapest, I could see a lot of military activity, and building barracks, and soldiers, and tanks, and things like that were-- they were obviously preparing for something.

How did you spend your days in Budapest?

Well, most of the day, I was studying the Talmud. And I didn't-- I don't think I had much time to spare. It was a question

of studying and then having something to eat and going to sleep.

You didn't do any work to supplement?

There was no work at all. I mean, not that I-- I didn't have to do any work whatsoever.

Was the Jewish religious life affected at all at this time?

Well, I cannot say for sure, but from my point of view, I didn't notice any specific effect in any way. I don't know exactly how it was before I arrived there. But from when I was there, I didn't see any-- I mean, the religious life could go on and normally, as far as I could see. I couldn't see any specific restrictions. I don't know whether there may have been, but I mean, I wasn't aware of them.

Were you aware of any anti-Jewish feeling at all?

Not particularly because, you see, the area I was in was virtually 99% Jewish. So I mean, we didn't mix very much. There wasn't the greatest sort of-- it was not a question of-- I wasn't coming into contact with non-Jewish population very much in any case. And I didn't-- so I didn't notice very much any. You couldn't tell.

Were there any ways in which the Jews were involved in the war at that time?

The only way, as far as I knew, they were involved was that all the able-bodied people were drafted into what they called labor camps. And these were used usually to go to the front of the-- and clear the mines in front of the soldiers. And of course, this is when some of them came back. A lot of them-- of course, there were heavy casualties among them. But those-- some of them who came back on-- either injured or they got a break, they would bring back stories of harrowing experiences of what they saw of the murder and massacre of the Jewish populations, and women, and children, and mass killings, and torturing.

And of course, this was very frightening to all of us. And well, we were-- everybody was hoping it wouldn't happen to us. But on the other hand, everybody was living in great fear and trepidation at the time, that if the Germans did come in, this-- things suddenly could be repeated over again where we are concerned.

Can you remember when the Germans arrived?

Well, I don't know exactly the date. But I understand it was-- it must have been in early '44.

What was the reaction of the Jewish community to the arrival of the Germans?

Well, they were obviously gripped by fear, and trepidation, and uncertainty. And of course, you see, naturally, the people who-- like myself, who were there not legally were the first one to be caught out in any way. Because you see, among the Hungarian collaborators, they would fish out, obviously, those who were living there on-- without papers. And even among the Hungarian Nazis and fascists, they still had a sort of-- a little soft spot for their own Hungarian Jews. And if they were-- if they had to provide sacrifices which were demanded by the Germans, they would probably first get rid of all the what they call expendable Jews.

Did this actually happen, do you think?

Yes. Oh, no, no doubt about it, you see, that those who had friends in high places among the Christians were probably still saved as long as possible. And of course, many of them were going to be-- were becoming-- were changing their religion in the hope of escaping deportation.

And this-- I don't know exactly. Obviously, it must have helped quite a few. But as far as the Germans were concerned, becoming a Catholic or Protestant didn't cut any ice with them at all. It was what you were born and what your father was. Even if you were a practicing Christian for two generations, if your parentage were Jews, then you were liable to



be-- were under sentence of death, virtually.

Did you consider changing your religion?

It never even occurred to me. At that time, you see, I were-- beside my complete upbringing would have been against that type of thing, to change the religion, if I-- even if I was threatened with immediate death, it didn't occur to me to say that I would change my religion. This is one thing-- it never even crossed my mind at the time.

Did life become more restrictive after the Germans arrived for the Jewish community?

Well, naturally. Naturally, it became-- everybody was worried, and things become became very difficult. I don't exactly remember how everything happened. But when the deportations started, I was, you see-- quite early in the stage, I was deported.

Can you describe what happened in the deportation? Firstly, were you aware that you were about to be deported? Did you have any indication?

Yes. we were all gathered together and put into what-- like cattle trucks, and which were then sealed. And of course, these tracks went over long distances until-- and I was quite aware exactly what was happening. And I remember clearly, I got myself a place on one of those-- there was a hole. And I could look through.

And during the whole period, while the train-- I hardly ate or drank anything. But my mind was going through throughout my whole life experience, my-- since I was-- since I could remember. And all the time, I was thinking about my family and various other things. And I felt quite often with the talk-- there was one lady there said, we're all going to be killed now. It's all finished. It's all-- and others said, no, something will happen. We'll be saved or whatever.

And I was virtually resigned. I thought, well, this looks like it's the end. And I was very-- my mind was going through various things. I couldn't quite fathom the reason why this whole thing is going on, what purpose, and what reason.

And this is what happened when we arrived. When we arrived there, there were-- and we were started, it was a-- I remember clearly, it was a very beautiful day. It was a sunny day. We must have arrived quite early in the morning, about 10 o'clock or so. And they started unloading the thing.

There was a young man who was-- quite a few young men there who were prisoners themselves. And they seemed-- their eyes seemed glazed. And they were shouting at the top of their voice, hurry, quick, like in German, schnell.

And one of them came to me and said to me, when they ask you how old are you, say you're 18. Well, I wasn't even 13 then. I was about 13. So I said, why? He said, don't ask any questions. He says, just say you're 18. So immediately, I had a feeling that it would be important for me to pretend that I'm older.

Anyhow, as we walk down there, I was suddenly separated from my brother and my grandmother. I didn't see them anymore. And when we came there, there was this man standing there. And he was pointing right and left.

Right seemed to be going all the able-bodied, and left were going all the women, and children, and old people. And when he pointed me to go to the left, I suddenly had a feeling that I have to go to the right. So I went to the right. And he shouted at me, I'm going to the wrong place. But I ignored it entirely and I ran out.

Did you know where you were-- where you'd been sent?

Well, we actually-- we were supposed to-- originally, they said, they were sending us for rehabilitation. But when the train stopped in various places, there were some local Poles who would get to the window. And they would tell us where this train is going. And they would, in fact, warn us that we were all going to-- almost to certain death, you see.

But the point was that some people, although we were also told that now, some young people, they are taking up for

labor camps. And so what happened was that there was no need. There was no point in panicking or in any case because there wasn't very much we could do. You see, I didn't-- I wasn't the one. I didn't talk to these people.

But some of the young-- some of the older ones, some of the older-- some of them 14-15 years old were talking to the people, or somebody 16 years old, or whatever. And they told them, some of the girls, especially girls in our coach, she was talking to one of the Poles and Polish girls. And they told her that they're killing everybody except those who are fit for work.

What were your first impressions of the camp on your arrival?

My first impression was that I could see was a big complex of barracks. And I could see some people moving around with huge-- something huge, the crematorium burning, blazing away.

Did you realize that was the crematorium when you saw it?

We knew that was the crematorium, but everybody knew that, you see. But we didn't know exactly where the gas chambers were located. And we didn't know exactly the whole-- what exactly-- how it was going on and what was going. All we also knew is that now, there-- you see, the rumors were going around, now, they were taking able-bodied people to transfer them to labor camps.

And of course, once I got through there, I thought I would have now a reasonable chance of being assigned to one of the labor camps. Of course, you see, there was still quite a bit to go. Because when we arrived there-- and there were-- we were all able-bodied men. And I remember that we-- they made a speech of some sort, which I quite ignored. And everybody took off their valuables and watches.

Who made the speech?

One of the prisoners, who was obviously one of the Sonderkommando. And everybody was crying. And they took their watches out and put them on a pile. And of course, I started picking up some nice watches. But somebody said to me, forget it, just put it back. And then, of course, we were told to undress. And we all-- we were all shaved. Our head was shaved and everything.

And we were given-- and then after that, we went into one of those what they call delousing things and we had a shower. And after that, we came out, we were given the pajama uniform with some boots, like wooden boots, which were very uncomfortable. And now, we were suddenly dressed in the concentration camp uniform. And we were assigned to various barracks.

Who assigned you to the barracks?

Well, whoever was there. It was all internally. I never saw an SS man very much. It was local administration which assigned us to the barracks. We were-- they were made up what they call of kapos and local leaders.

And quite a lot of those kapos were German prisoners who were murderers, or robbers, or whatever, who were doing life imprisonment. And they often were extremely cruel and-- since years and years of internment made them very bitter and cruel. And they used to get out their-- the pleasure they get out is from their sadism and from torturing or whatever other prisoners, although they were prisoners themselves.

What effect did this induction into the camp have on you at the time?

At the time, I was not exactly particular-- any specific effect. All my thoughts at the time was to get some food because I was starving hungry. And there wasn't any available-- or to get some water sometimes to drink. And I remember, also, when I was-- we were in that camp, in that barracks for several nights and days, and we were-- I was very thirsty.

And there was this kapo standing there with a huge stick. And there was a barrel of water. And people used to try and

get the water. And he used to hit them on the head. He used to smash their heads in if they went near it. And I was-- got so thirsty, I thought I might as well get my head smashed in. And I went over to get some water, but he didn't hit me. He gave me the water.

Why do you think he did that?

Well, because I was very young. And of course, he would hit most people, but he didn't hit me. But I was already prepared to be hit. I just couldn't. I was so thirsty. I thought I would have to have a drink. If I get my head smashed in, well, so be it. It will be better than dying of thirst, which was terrible. And OK. And then, you see, what happened was afterwards, we were all lined up outside.

And there were those kapos came around, and obviously, under instructions, they had to read out-- because apparently, quite a few young people slipped through the net. And they were-- would be transferred to the children's camp, which would, of course, mean absolutely almost certain the gas chamber. And I was picked out that morning.

And somehow, I had a feeling in my stomach that I have to get away. And as soon as they didn't look, I was back into the other lot. And this happened on several occasions. And once, we were sitting on the Appellplatz in Birkenau, and they were going through the people.

And when they came to me, they asked me, how old are you? So I stood on my toes, and I said, I was 18. And of course, they knew I wasn't. But they decided to allow me to go through.

And you see, this was actually the last hurdle. Because after that, we all lined up. And we got tattooed. You see, and once you got tattooed, it meant that you were being transferred to a labor camp, you see. And from then, from there, we walked up to what was called a camp in Auschwitz, where we stayed only a few nights.

And from there, we marched to a camp called Buna Monowitz. And Buna Monowitz was quite a large camp. But from Buna Monowitz, they used to have what they call labor camps. We used to go out into a big complex of-- it was IG Farben complex, which they were building huge factories-- huge. It was tremendous complex. And also, there was a lot of outside work coming in. In fact, many English prisoners of war were working there too because there was a close-by prisoner of war camp.

What were the eating arrangements at Birkenau?

Well, the only food, I think I remember getting was when they-- once, they-- or perhaps even less than that, they used to bring around a sort of barrel of some sort of soup or whatever. And you got a little bit of that. That's about all you got.

They take it round to the actual huts themselves?

No, they would take around to the huts. And you would all line up. And we would have a thing, where you get a little bit of soup. And that would be the whole thing you would get. And some of the soup was so rotten, I couldn't even eat it.

What were the conditions in the huts like themselves?

The conditions were not-- obviously not pleasant. They were very crowded. You would live-- a lot of people would lie on-- packed like sardines in those bunkers. And you weren't-- we weren't there long enough, but whatever it is, it was quite unpleasant, I should imagine, but nothing what was yet to come.

Were you given any instructions at that time about rules for the barracks?

There were. You see, there were-- there was talk about it. But I didn't take much notice. I mean, there was always speeches being made by the kapos or whatever. And I wasn't taking a great deal of notice what they were saying. In fact, the ones I remember-- one of them said to me afterwards that we were greeted with the words, you are now in a German concentration camp in Birkenau.

And the only way out from here is through the chimney. No, but I didn't even take much notice of that, in any case. I was just-- my mind were always-- was always thinking about something else. I was not really taking extreme worry about what they were saying, what everybody was saying.

What were you thinking about? Can you remember?

Well, I was just thinking, what-- I mean, how is this all going to end? How are we going to get out of this? How are we going to get out of this predicament?

How long did you stay in Birkenau for?

Only a few days.

And then you went to?

To Auschwitz, where we stayed another few days. And from then, we marched to Buna Monowitz.

Were conditions in Auschwitz significantly different from Birkenau?

I can't recollect a great deal of difference, not as far as we were concerned. I think they were virtually the same. We maybe-- perhaps we must have got a bit more food in Auschwitz.

When you arrived at Buna Monowitz, what was the first thing that happened to you there?

Well, we were all assigned to different barracks, and what they called-- we were at barracks. And then afterwards, we were all assigned to different Kommandos. They called it Kommandos. For very-- and in the morning when you got up, we all got a bowl of black coffee and some bread and marge. And then we would stand on the Appell after you can-- you were able to wash your-- do a bit of washing-- not a great deal.

How long were you given to do all this?

Well, there used to be an alarm. I don't remember exactly the amount of time you were given, but not a great deal of time. But you had to be ready quite quickly. And then you were given some-- that breakfast, what they call, some black bread and some marge and coffee. And then you would go on the Appeal. And you have to go to your own Kommando thing. Everybody was assigned to a Kommando.

And then we would march out of the camp to-- and at the entrance to the camp, there was musicians playing. And we would march out and then march into the-- which is not very far, probably, about a mile and a half or two miles away, the factory, the big complex was.

And we would march in there. And from there, at lunchtime, we would have some soup. And in the evening, when we came back to the camp, we would have some more soup. And this was the meal. But that was quite good compared to what you would get in other places.

How was the food better? Was it just different?

Well, it wasn't a question of better, but it was more plentiful. Whereas, you see, in other places, you would get one soup a day, here, you got at least two soups a day, plus some coffee and a piece of bread, which means the ration was actually three times as much as nowhere.

What were the facilities like for washing, and toilets, and so on?

There wasn't a great facilities, but there was a place you could go and running water. There was running water there,

where you could wash, and sometimes even have a shower in Buna Monowitz.

Did you have free access to this? Or was there any restricted times when you could actually go there?

I don't remember exactly how the situation was, whether you had permission or whether you could just have free access to.

Were there any facilities for exercise? I know it sounds rather stupid, anyway.

Yes, there were some. On Sunday, they used to have on what they called Appellplatz, they used to play football. But it might be-- then it was a-- well, it was-- usually happened, the players were invariably longstanding prisoners, like German criminal prisoners. And there were some-- very few, but occasionally, maybe some Jewish prisoners as well would be taken into the team. But generally speaking, the team was made up of lifers.

Did you actually participate in any of these?

I never participated in any activities like that. I mean, I used to watch it, but I didn't personally participate in any activities like that.

Were there any facilities for you to wash your clothing?

I don't think so, no. No, no facilities for that. But you would get probably-- you could get a change of clothing every now and again. But otherwise, there was no washing. I don't remember washing clothes.

Do you recall getting changes of clothing?

Yes, you get change of clothes.

How frequently did that happen?

Not very frequently.

Can you describe the routine of roll call in the camp?

The roll call would be, obviously, that the kapo would make sure that all his men are in-- all his people are in. And of course, in the morning, the roll call was for the Kommandos. And they would make sure that all-- everybody's available is there who should be there. And of course, if somebody didn't turn up, there would be an alarm because they would probably suspect an escape attempt or whatever-- hiding or whatever.

Did you yourself have any experience of--

Well, what happened to me once because I was out in a Kommando with an-- and the kapo was a German Green, and was obviously a murderer. And he was doing life. And he seemed quite nice to me. But he said to me-- when we got there, he says, you don't have to do the hard work, you can stay in the hut.

And then suddenly, one day, he came in, and locked the door, and he started undressing me. And I fought back. I wouldn't agree. And you see, then I started screaming. And of course, there was a tremendous bang on the door. And he promptly let me put my clothes on again and opened the door. And this was this Polish engineer, who was working, who was not a prisoner, but he was also working up in the factory.

And of course, you see, I was rather depressed. But I was afraid to say anything to anybody about it. And the next day, absolutely, why did-- I was so unhappy, I decided, I wasn't going in on Appell. And I hid myself in the barrack. And of course, you see, there was a tremendous alarm, and searches, and everything, I guess.

And eventually, they found me. And I was brought to the head of the camp leader. And I was asked various questions. And I was beaten absolutely senseless. I mean, I was blue and black. And I was completely unconscious. And I had marks all over me.

And of course, you see-- and after that, especially, they realized what happened, you see. And although they didn't do-- I don't know what they did to him or whatever. But the fact that I didn't talk, you see, probably impressed him quite a bit. Because I did not tell them what happened.

Where were you taken after this beating up?

After the beating up, I wasn't taken anywhere, but I was allowed to-- they gave me a new job in the camp. You see, well, I didn't have to go out to Kommando. But they gave me a new job. Because although I was tortured and beaten, I did not denounce the kapo. I did not say what he did.

Because I don't know what would have happened to him. But I was worried about what might happen to me. I wasn't particularly worried about what would happen to him, but I thought, if I talk, I might make things much worse for myself. So I didn't say anything.

And of course, you see, they all knew what happened because they knew him. And yet, they were very much impressed by the fact that despite all the beatings and torture, I just refused to say anything. You can cut it out, can you?

Yeah. It's only this-- the reason why I'm cutting you out, it's not because it's irrelevant or anything like that. It's just that it's-- we're halfway through.

Right.