

Agnes Sassoon, reel three. Agnes, what kind of work were you expected to do whilst you were in Dachau?

I saw other people working, going out in groups to work very hard, whoever was able to. And I had the opportunity through Alex' connection to go to the kitchen sometimes. And don't you think that you could sit in the kitchen and clean potatoes and not to be-- not to be watched. You were hit. While you cleaned the potatoes, I got a lot of bangs on my head, on my shoulder. They say schnell, schnell, quick, quick.

They didn't really need it quick. You know what I mean? I mean, we didn't have the energy or so on. And I never saw those potatoes for us. That was probably for the staff.

And then one day, it was very hard to get out to the village to the peasants because from Dachau they took people who could cut trees and things like that. But Alex arranged it one day that I gone in the group, and he thought I can get some food.

How would Alex be able to arrange?

Well, he had one or two soldiers there that he was the favorite of. And he had sometimes when they were in good mood, as I mentioned in the book, they treated him like a favorite dog. And the other day they kicked him. But when he was lucky and he played some music, he could get a favor out of them.

And even sometimes, they fed them. But if he would give it-- if they would know that he gives it to someone else, they would just as well hit him and punish him. You know, it was very strange world. They were always drinking beer, and he was playing music. And they realized that he's half-Jewish, actually.

What kind of music did he play?

He played Tchaikovsky. I don't know. I was there not understanding at all, just a bit of music.

What instrument did he play?

Yes, he played-- he knew to play piano, I know. But he played violin and piano.

And he played to the Germans.

And he played to the Germans, and they used to-- they used to like classical music and all sorts of music. And they served the beer. They drank the beer, and they did it. And that's what he told me. I never was there.

And when we could-- we couldn't talk like I can talk with you. I mean, you can imagine it was only scraps of minutes while he passed on to me something, when he smuggled something to me. Other people didn't have to see, because if they saw, they got, for instance, jealous, like I mentioned before. I could have just one person that reported, and I'm dead.

And I was very ill, and he did try to keep me alive. And in the end, he was shot. And I will never forget him ever in my life-- ever, ever, ever.

And he got you onto this work detail going out of the camp.

Yes. But then in another time when I worked on the farm-- when we slept on the farm, and I mentioned it in the book. And I wanted-- I picked up some grains from the chicken feed, and a very fat German woman, peasant woman, who was the owner, big farm, one of the owners, she was reported it.

That few grains reported to the German guard. There were many guards. And he nearly tore out my mouth and took out the two or three grains which I had in my mouth. So that's what made me think that they say we didn't know about it and

only the soldiers. Well, what the hell was it, an ordinary woman of a peasant farm to do such a thing with a little girl or an old person or any person, to go for three grains?

Instead, I never can imagine myself, even if they would be my biggest enemies and murderers in Alcatraz, everywhere I would do and try to do my best to give them something, what ever criminals they are. So I just think myself that they were under mass spell of Hitler, mass spell, that they were not in their right mind.

They too treated the Jews--

They were like from another planet, but they were not the same human being, what any human being is supposed to be. And today, Germany, I see individuals, but it took me a while. I never hated them for the past. I don't know. I can't hate.

I just thought that they were the dehumanized people which were not humans, and we were the humans. That's what I thought always. And that's how I could survive, because I just thought they are just like mechanized games, like Doctor Who now or something or these stories which is unbelievable and is not really true. And it's just a dream, and I was thinking, thinking many times. There were one or two who you could say that in all the time, one or two only in the whole time, that I could say that they have some human feelings.

So suddenly the new Germany wants to know, and they don't let them know about it. Because the Holocaust is not the same like books like mine and individual papers. Many people write about hate, and that I agree they shouldn't have.

Because this book, a child's book, has to be objective or a [? grown ?] [? up ?] book, and to say, well, they were not normal, really, it was a phase, a not normal phase, and it should not happen again ever. And that's the whole reason that I'm willing to go all through and repeat it and go out of my way to get it for no earnings and no money.

And I would do anything to get it to Germany, because the kids there shouldn't be not left and not right, because they would understand with their heart. Because from all this Holocaust they couldn't understand it. And Anna Frank was a nice story, a true story. But then she was unfortunate as well. But she was in a house.

Whatever bad circumstances, on the end she came to Bergen-Belsen. But yet she didn't stand so much Appell. She didn't live among those outside. She had a lot of anxious minutes, but she was still looking out for the trees, you remember.

And that's a marvelous, adoring person she was, but it's not the same to go through like the grown ups go through. And we survived. And they were family camps where they could buy out people for money in Bergen-Belsen later from Switzerland. So I heard it later, and I was going through all this and couldn't escape because when they told me, go right, I went left. And they told me left, I went right.

And when I look back, I played a game like a child. And when I was in the dangerous minutes, I felt it very bad, very dangerous. I always hoped and believed in God. And I always hoped that tomorrow will be better. And it was worse. And I thought worse can't be.

And when Alex gone, I finished. I thought I finished.

Can you tell me about this incident where Alex came to visit you in your barracks when you were ill?

Well, I was very ill. And he came several times, but that time he brought-- I don't know from where he took some little milk or something. And usually when they recognized him, even if he would be coming in, they wouldn't shoot him from the tunnel. And as he climbed, he always knew when the lamp goes around, because it was not allowed to speak to women.

It was a woman's barracks.

Yes. Yes, it was separate from the men's. This is all so complicated to explain it, you know? And it was a big danger even to him, that. But a couple of-- or three or four, he had probably some people that they knew him. And then it was

also the kapos were very dangerous, Jewish kapos. You know, they were just the same under the terms of who can be-- I mean, for your own good you hit your fellow friends.

Once I came across with a Kapo as well. And she was a rabbi's daughter. I heard it later. She looked beautiful. As I described it, she had boots. She could travel with certificates. And she used to bugger me all the time. Sorry for this word, but all the time.

And she looked-- and I was the little mangy thing. I once wanted to go to that place, to the ladies. And this was not allowed. It was curfew, and she came with me just for no reason, so to hit me. And she was alone. There was no German soldier beside her then.

And I came, and I told her in her face, I can't understand what do you want from me. I'm a little nobody. You are going in these nice elegant clothes and with good food, and you are a rabbi's daughter. So what do you want from another Jewish girl or for any human being? I thought she will kill me, and she didn't. She kept away from me since then.

What do you mean?

She kept away. Whenever she saw me in the camp, whenever she counted me, and she was with the stick, she looked away, and she didn't come near me. God saved me.

So previously she'd hit you regularly with her--

Yeah, but you know-- I mean, regularly, what I mean, not every day. Whenever I came across somehow or she was near me. Just not really hard. But then when that time when I was on my own and I did irregular thing, well, I told her what I thought. I thought if she kills me, she kills me. A child has no fear.

And she left you alone then.

She left me. She never could look at me anymore in my face. She always left me out. When they counted Appell and they said, you go here, you go there, she never told me anything.

What did the rest of the inmates feel about the kapos?

Well, I don't know. I don't hate them, even them. I have no hate in me, but I think they lynched a few, and they jailed a few. And I think if somebody could come out from a camp well looking, she must have been a Kapo, or he. Because I don't think that anyone after that, even to being a few weeks or a few months in a camp, could come well looking out.

So that's what my own feelings and opinion is. Because you can't-- you couldn't-- you couldn't. If there were family camps where they paid up money, let's say, they get to have some passes or something. But in an ordinary camp, no way, no way.

And after Dachau, when Petrushka died, Alex, I thought it's end, really end. And I didn't even think of the future when I wanted to touch that wire.

Can you tell me about that incident now? Alex is coming-- he got out. He was always watching the lights. He knew exactly the minutes when the lights are coming in the evening.

The searchlights.

Searchlights, right. And somehow the searchlight didn't come regular time, and they didn't see who it is, anyway. And he just shot. He was an idiot. Because I think if they would have known that he's Alex, he wouldn't have shot. He just did not know whether it was a woman or--

He'd come to give you some milk.

Yes.

What was the matter with you?

Well, I don't know. I think I had by then typhoid. Already keep coming and going because all my hair fell out. They shaved it, but it came out anyway, my hair. And I was very sick. When I was in typhoid later in the hospital, I knew that I had maybe that disease the same. It was just going on. I just don't know how I survived.

And as Alex left your barracks--

And as he left there, I heard this shot, and everyone looked out. And then the Germans came in and pushed everyone, and everyone had suffering, not only me. I didn't care whether they shoot me or not. I jumped out after him. And then his body, I described it. And Alex was everything for me.

And even though I never, never-- nothing can make me upset. When I'm upset and really upset for no camp reasons, no, that's gone, by, finished, gone. It shouldn't happen anymore. It's gone.

But I always see his face with his black, beautiful eyes and alabaster skin, well very deep in. I will always see that eyes. And it was just a few weeks away, the liberation, really.

And how long had he survived in Dachau?

10 years, nearly.

And he was shot three weeks before.

So you know, it's not three weeks before. It was more, but then we had to go in other camp. You see, the Germans were in disarray then, by then. I thought it's finished now. But it wasn't finished. It was even more and more and more walking.

What happened when you were holding Alex's body?

Well, I thought they will kick me, they will shoot me, they will do anything. But funnily enough, they just-- I didn't even feel the pain, you know? But they didn't kill me.

But then I went, and I wanted to touch the wire, the fence. And I didn't care if they shoot me. And an older man, an older SS man, or Wehrmacht-- I don't know even what, but he was not a young guy. This is the only German face in uniform that I can remember.

He said, no, don't. Don't do it because there is no electricity at all. We haven't got-- in the house, there's electricity. They don't put electricity now in the fence because we haven't got it. Will be soon finished, the war, and you will survive, and we will perish. And that's what he said to me, and I really, truly remember only this man's face.

And I as a child, I wrote the truth. And I tell the good and the bad, right? And that's how it was. And he was in tears because he loved Alex, and I think he wanted to shelter me because of him. His guilt came up or something.

This was the only one, when I came with a human face to face. Yeah.

Were you shocked at his reaction?

When he told me there's no electricity in the wire, I mean, he risk his life, really. I mean, they didn't have anything any more to eat. They were in disarray. They were running. I didn't know that, right?

But we had to walk then because, again, walk and the dead bodies were put on the wagons, and I don't know what to do. And if they told-- if somebody couldn't walk, they told them to go on the carriages. And I knew that they told us-- they told us who goes on carriages that they are going to hospitals.

I knew who was going to hospital, he will be dead. So I had this instinct in me. Nobody-- I wasn't enough big or clever, but I had this instinct. I never went to that carriage. Like I didn't go to that wagon for the children.

Were there any gas chambers in--

Dachau? Yes.

In Dachau?

Yes.

Did you know what they were? I didn't know, actually, then.

You didn't know at the time.

No, I didn't know at the time. They told us, but I somehow-- Alex told me. I thought Auschwitz is only for the gas somehow, you know?

Did everybody know about Auschwitz?

Yes. The one soldier came to the other soldier. The kapos were lovers to the soldiers.

Yeah.

It somehow came through between the older people, you see? Grown ups. But for me, I was everything like in a dream. You know? And I just did my instincts, what I wanted to do. But then I was very sorry there were some people. I was crying. I saw people crying for their children.

I saw praying people, you know? And then when I wanted to cut out my mind not to see the dead bodies, not to see the beatings, not to feel it. I cut out my brain, and I wrote my book chapter by chapter, everything what happened.

In your head?

In my head. Because a few times I tried to get hold of paper and pen, and my writing was not that fabulous because I was not so much that fabulously educated, right? So the scraps of paper, once they nearly killed me for it, yeah?

They found them.

Yes. And since then, I just wrote my book in the minute I was free.

What did they do when they found your scraps of paper?

Once, they made me kneel down, and they hit me here.

On the back of the neck?

Back of the neck. Once they squenched out my hand like this.

Squeezed your wrist?

Well, when they burned it, that was later. But I can't tell you. I mean, so many things they done for what. It was not the torture. The torture common, but just the way that they beat you. They didn't care whether it's on the head or on the neck or on the--

Sometimes I thought they shoot me when made me kneel down. But you see, I'm speaking a lot about beating. Many people won't find it that they were beaten so much. But you see, the thing is, who worked, they were not beaten so much.

But you were too young.

And that is not only because whoever couldn't work wasn't enough strong, and it was not in the gas chambers. It was not that. They had more opportunities to beat us and to have us for the Appells, you see? And that is the explanation. Many people say that I can't understand how you were beaten so many times. They had much more opportunity to get hold of us to beat us.

Because you weren't working.

Because we weren't working, and we were all the time going, doing some useless work or some work which they just repeated to do, or standing hours in the Appells. A woman collapsed behind me, and we wanted to steal her away. We still were human. We wanted to help her.

And when they realized it, that we wanted to steal her, they beat everyone, everyone around us. And they made us stand two hours longer in the cold.

On Appell.

Because we wanted to hide the woman.

Were you clothed during Appell, or were there any naked--

Slowly they took away. What they did, we went Dachau, and then I was also in Landsberg. In Landsberg 11, it was near to Dachau, I understand. I don't know. They said then that it belonged to Dachau.

That was, for me, a bit better because there was a German medical woman who put me in the ward there. It was a little bunker with four beds. She made me like I would work, do something there. And there were-- every time they done it with us, every camp, new camp, whatever we had still on, on the top, underneath that clothes what they gave us, some underwear, they always took it away.

I think that was only for suffering. We had to strip, because they called it the delousing.

Delousing?

Yeah. And they took the stick, that soldier or that officer, and-- alles herunternehmen! Everything. I understood German, so I was quite lucky with that. Because when they spoke German, the others didn't know. I knew what will happen.

So he'd pull at your clothing with the stick.

So he said, herunternehmen. All right. So I made myself. I do it. And then he looked over the other one already following, continuing to tell to the other one. And I put it back quick and put back my striped clothes.

So you managed to keep your underclothes.

So I really swindled. I did learn from Alex. He told me how to do this. If you get frightened and you do, and they beat

you anyway, you just try to get away with it.

So you'd have to get dressed again quickly to keep your underclothes. Otherwise, they'd take them off you.

Yes. And they said to take it off, but occasionally I didn't. And then I got somewhere else something else, another rag. So the rag got lousy. Put it in the snow that the lice should go out. It's not nice to talk about it, but so it was.

So who was the human, I ask you? Who could do this with old and children and-- not children. There were no children, really. I mean, in family camps there were lots of children, and family camps. But not many children could survive.

There was another young girl with me who was older than me a bit, and she went crazy, unfortunately, on the end of the walking. And she started--

Is this walking from Dachau to Landsberg?

It was between the walking after Dachau, that we was in a hay, and she slept, and her bread was stolen. And she accused everyone that-- maybe it was true it was stolen her. And she from then started to get crazy.

And you know, we had to hold her back because--

Hold her down.

--we didn't want her to be killed. And that was in between we arrived-- before we arrived to Bergen-Belsen. And she was a very beautiful-eyed girl. And though she was older, she stuck to me.

She felt that I'm support. And she didn't have confidence later when her bread was stolen. And my bread was stolen as well. Not the same time, another time. But people were hungry, so they did these things, you know?

And once we got bread for a week or what they said it should keep, but I know that is forever, because we will never have-- we will be dead by then. I thought so because they gave us a whole bread, a hard, hard bread.

You know what? We had to throw it away because we couldn't carry it. We didn't have the energy.

So they gave you the whole--

Yes.

The whole ration.

The whole ration for the walk, because I thought we will never see anyone. And this girl on the end, I saw her in Bergen-Belsen. I went to look for her when I had an opportunity. She was in this crazy ward where I saw she couldn't recognize me.

What were the food rations like at Dachau?

Nothing, so to speak. There were soups occasionally. And you didn't know even the timing.

Would you get something each day?

Sometimes maybe-- maybe a week or two gone without any bread, but maybe we got a hot, warm something soup-like thing. But no bread. Bread-- very rare. And if you had a piece of bread, you had to save it, really save it to cut it with this wire to save it, even if it was one slice.

How did you come to leave Dachau? Then what happened?

Well, I think they had to evacuate, because they had to run, and they wanted to kill how many they could. And they made people who couldn't walk anymore to walk. And some they put it on these carriages and everything, and I think they just shot them or just they let them die.

And we went in a sample camp on the way for one night. I thought it is a heaven, because the first place in winter I saw flower, I saw cleanliness, tidiness, and Red Cross flag, and all sorts of things. And it was everything organized.

I thought here will be fine. Maybe it is the end.

You thought you were going to stay there?

We're going to stay. Well, there was a sample camp. They call it Mustercamp where the Red Cross comes to inspect it occasionally, yes? International Red Cross, so they told me later.

And I had there a terrific toothache, and we had to queue up for soup. And I didn't have any more any energy. What was in the soup? You had tins. And if your tin got lost, you couldn't have any other tin, so you couldn't have even a soup. You understand? So it was up to you to hang onto things. And you couldn't sometimes because they made you lose it, you know?

And somebody was shivering, couldn't get soup. And if you wanted to help, then you were nearly killed for it. So you had to be very careful to do these things. And we did it. We did risk our life for this.

And then when I went back to this bunker, very clean, very tidy, and there were really good. And they still they came on me, and I started to scream. I knew what it means, screaming. It means death. And then two soldiers kicked me all over, and they said they take me.

They wanted to shut me up. They pushed me down, my inmates, like I did with this other girl.

To save her.

Yes, and I couldn't. I just had a terrible toothache, and I just-- everything I could bear, but I couldn't that. I had to scream. They came in. What's los? What's los? And they kicked me all the way, miles down in the camp. It's a very tidy camp, it was.

I didn't see so many soldiers with guns and so many inmates outside. And it was really a barrack of hospital. And there was a dentist with white clothes and SS women-- oh, they're beautiful. They're all beautiful, they were-- and a Jewish dentist.

And they apparently, later I found out from someone, they were lovers. I don't know why that was. And he just sat me down in the chair, pulled out my tooth. He said, sorry I haven't got any anesthetic. Pulled out my tooth. They gave me something, and the soldiers took me back, kicked me back. But I didn't believe it that I'm alive and I'm out with my tooth.

Thought they'd kill you for screaming.

So unpredictable story, which is true, everything. You didn't know from one second to the other. Then the next day, we were on our way.

What was this sample camp? Was it what the Germans were saying they usually kept Jews in?

That's right. That's right. That was probably what they said, that that is like a heaven to the other camps, because it was clean. It was given some food and a bit of bread, and there were flowers, and were tidy. It were doctors and dentists, as you see.



So this was the kind of camp that the Germans were telling the Red Cross that all the Jews were in.

That's right, probably. I think so. I don't know. But I think so because that's what they told me. This is a Mustercamp. I do understand. The others didn't understand. It was not written Mustercamp, because it was written-- I don't know what was written.

What exactly does that mean?

Arbeit macht los. But I don't know what camp it was, but I know that it was the Germans saying this is a Mustercamp. So I know.

Can you translate that?

I translated it, this is a sample camp. Yeah? So next day, on our way, I just couldn't believe it. I always hoped God will help me. And--

Agnes Sassoon, real four. Agnes, you were telling me that you now were just about to leave this sample camp where you had stayed overnight and seen the dentist and had a tooth removed and been beaten.

Not beaten but pushed with the guns all the way there and back. And I was relieved, despite still my tooth was aching, but I knew that it's out, and it made me more comfortable. And when I got back in the barracks, nobody wanted to believe it, that I'm back.

And, well, I prayed, and I really prayed, and I prayed to mighty-- I prayed. I really didn't know what I wanted. I wanted to see my parents with me, to find them somewhere on the route, like other people find their relatives sometimes.

Or not to find them. I didn't know what is better for me, if they would survive if I don't meet them, or they will survive with me if I meet them. So I really did not know what to pray for.

And whenever new groups were coming in any camps, I was watching out for my parents. And I prayed that I should see them. And another minute, I prayed that I shouldn't see them, because maybe that's bad, you know? So I didn't know, really didn't know what's happening.

Then we started to walk, and we slept in pigsties, in farms. And that was the time when it happens with this grain which I don't want to go back with the story that the woman went to the soldier to say that I picked some grains and put it in my mouth, and it was a terrible thing.

And then we slept once in another pigsty with the pigs warming us because it was very cold. And then we slept. We ate the roots from under the snow and under the snowy path because I don't know whether it was so wintry, but in those Bavarian and wherever we went-- I don't know where we went. We went the whole Germany. Even we went to Sudeten Deutschland somehow on all our ways back and forwards.

I don't know because they themselves were on run. They themselves didn't have anything to eat, bread or something. So we got even less. So we couldn't carry the last time what we got. And then suddenly, when I couldn't walk anymore, I really gave up. I didn't give so up that I had rags on my feet and holding me and everything.

And the soldier saw, and he told me, please do go there and have a rest, and then you join the group. And then when he shot me, and he thought he shot me in my heart. And after a while, I don't know how long I was there, I heard voices. And someone came, and they were Germans with French prisoners of war.

And they heard the noise that I said, uh, uh, you know? I did not know. I was just coming unconscious. And I thought I'm in the other world. I thought I am in the heaven. You know, I thought I'm dead.

Where had you been shot, whereabouts in your body?

That was in my leg. He didn't want to shoot me in the leg. Even now, you can't make it good plastic surgery with it because it was disfigured, because it was-- you see, here it's gone in. It was a bullet, a German bullet.

And they took it out, ordinary doctor. After I will tell you the story. So anyway, this leg, I did feel first when they shot me. I didn't feel anything. Then I felt a heaviness, and then I probably conked out. I don't know whether I was out days or hours or what, you know?

I just was in a great, hot, heat fever. Fever I had. And it was in the snow lying between Christmas trees, you know?

So you were all marching along. How many was there of you?

Well, I don't know. There were rows and rows. If I would tell you, I would lie. 100 maybe? Or I don't know. They're all marching because the soldiers, they didn't know where to go. They directed them all.

And you felt you couldn't go any further?

I just couldn't. They saw me that I'm out of the way, and I just-- they told me to go to rest. And I didn't believe and believe. I didn't know what to believe. I went up to there and sat. He just came there quietly and shot me. And he laughed. He didn't even bother to look.

Did you see who shot you? Did you?

I did. I saw the gun against me. And that minute I said finish. No, what can I do? I thought finished. I didn't feel anything else. And then I felt a great heat, and I thought I'm in the other world. I mean it. It's true. That feeling is even now in me.

And then I started to open my eyes. I saw people. First of all, I saw civilian ragged people, then with soldier hats. Then I saw German soldiers. And they argued. And again, they spoke French. I know a bit French.

And the German argued. He said, nein. These Juden, they will go. I am a Jew, and I will go in other places. And they were soldiers. They were, I think, prisoners of war.

They were also evacuating them from the camps probably, as I found out later, my luck, and they insisted that they should take me with them. And they had a little Red Cross carriage, and they put me there, and I was in terrific pain after.

I didn't feel my leg. And I said, no, I'm finished. I thought I'm dead first. And then when I saw these people, they took me there. There was a doctor, a Hungarian doctor with these French prisoners. And he came from a Hungarian town. And he had just a hand knife, and he took the bullet out with a hand knife. And they cut off some trees and put the trees and made my leg.

Made a splint.

A splint, because it was terrible. You see how ugly it is after so many years. And my father didn't let it to have an operation because they would have to break it, to cut it, and I might have not-- I might not be able to walk properly like this. It's not shorter, you know? And I can walk on it properly. He said so it will be ugly, and that's it.

Because if they make a plastic surgery, it's not enough they cover the skin, because it's crooked. Yeah?

So you're left with a fairly big scar.

Anyway, I had a lot of great pain and temperature, and they didn't have no medicine, nothing. They did what they could.

It was a bit of alcohol, and the Germans argued. They didn't want to take me. And the French, they were probably holding something about the prisoners of war. There was a high ranking officer, a French. And he insisted that they should take me.

What did you look like at this stage, physically?

Well, I was just like one of those corpses of Bergen-Belsen. I mean, by then I was not--

Skeletal.

They didn't know. They didn't know that-- you couldn't tell. You could tell that-- I don't know how they could tell if you are old or young. I don't know.

Was your head shaved?

Head was shaved. The hair was falling out, the hair from the typhoid, because I had constantly. I think I was constantly ill. I don't know.

By this time, you'd have been skeletal.

And by then I have the ribs out, and brown crumpled skin, like they have now in these children--

What did the French prisoners of war think about the way you looked? Were they shocked?

Well, they know. They were not because they so many camps by now. They told me that Hungarian doctor was a Jew as well, and he somehow came to that camp because they didn't have enough doctors. And now they went through a lot of camps. They were evacuating, and Bergen-Belsen was the last place, I think, or not the last place. I don't know.

So we got to Bergen-Belsen somehow. And by then that I got to Bergen-Belsen, it started to be disarray, you see.

It would be in 1945 now?

Yes, yes.

Where?

The end of the war, end of the-- end of the story, really, when it was before the liberation. And I know that there was a Weberei. Weberei, it means that you do with knitting things or whatever, materials. And beside that was a family camp, where families could exist on very little, but could exist with children together because they were paid up by-- I don't know. They told me. I don't know whether it's true.

But paid money?

Paid money from Switzerland.

To be left alone.

Somebody to get them out. And--

What exactly-- can you tell me about your arrival at Bergen-Belsen?

Oh, I was very ill.

You were still in the Red Cross van?

Yes, I was. And because I were with French soldiers, they put me in this Weberei building, which the Weberei meant that it's not the camp where they kill each other. They were working people, but I couldn't work. But in that time, it started to be that I saw the heaps of bodies, the corpses in heaps, and I couldn't walk properly because I had terrific pains, and I was hopping around, and all what I wanted to look for-- the kitchen.

Where were the heaps of bodies? Outside?

Everywhere, outside the block barracks. Everywhere.

Was any attempt--

And some people-- some people who still were corpse but they used to carry in the deep ditches, they couldn't burn enough or didn't have any more fuel or what. So they carried them, and there were heaps on carriages, and they carried people like a chain, carried the dead bodies who were maybe not dead. Just put them in that, what is in my book, in that graves. And they themselves fall into it, and they were still alive. And that's true.

They'd be buried.

And then when people saw this, noticing that they were not moved, they were not dummies. They were all in tears in their eyes. And they said, Shema Yisrael. Hear me, God, adonai. And they were humans. They were not dehumanized, but those who dictated it, they were dehumanized.

So we thought we were really the humans, and they are just-- I can't even call animal, because it must have been something extraordinary machinery.

So you're saying that the Jews weren't dehumanized, that they still felt.

You see, when in the camp, when we were five in one bunk, when it was not the long bank, when it was separate bunks, they put five sticks, and one body died. So we were discussing, we didn't know who we are. We didn't recognize each other and what you are.

But we discussed it, if this body, we can't move the body because the Germans don't let us move it. We have to sleep with them.

With the dead bodies.

So if somebody had a blanket or a rag, some of the dead who died, if we should take it off her and use it as survivor or we should leave it from respect. So that much human we were. So when they told that they found us dehumanized in heaps and begging for bread, that is really not true, because they were begging for sanitary situations and things like that, but not begging. They just saw that we are-- maybe they saw they are liberated. They wanted to be taken notice.

Because I myself was on a heap that they wanted to bury and push, shovel away. And because I spoke out--

How long were you in Belsen? How long was it before--

I don't think I was very long there. I don't think very long. I can't tell you the time, but I must have been by the end a couple of weeks maybe or so. I don't really know.

And did you stay in this work barrack?

No, after they started to go with this white thing, it was end. It started to be disorganized. They were not anymore. One, it happened to me on the beginning, though, that this potato, that I found that potato. I started to say I went to the kitchens. Because that was my priority always, Alex told me.

And I really found the kitchen, and I don't know. I can't tell you. It is very complicated story. I got hold of a small potato on the dead bodies. And where they burned them on heaps and clothes, things, I put it, the potato on because I couldn't eat it raw, to have it warm, to have it a bit baked.

It didn't matter. It was not because I was dehuman but there was no other choice, you see?

The fire was burning, the clothes.

The fire was burning, so I put the potato in. And a beautiful woman, I always think of Irma Grese. I don't know if she was in Bergen-Belsen, but she looked like Irma Grese and with a beautiful strong shoe with nails and beautiful face. Oh, they were beautiful.

And she told me, oh, yeah, it's a nice potato. Warm your hand over it. And I put my hand over, and I looked at her. She smiled like she was good, and she started to push my hand down until they squashed the potato in the fire.

So even now I have signs on my hand from it. It was broken, one of the bones. And that was the last experience which was that terrifying from bodily harm. Then in the bunk, as I said, when the doctors did this program, which it amazed me and also affected me very badly, I was crying and wrote a letter to the producer that they were very good-hearted people, these doctors.

The doctors who went to Belsen from England.

Yes, I know. But then they said that the Hungarian, they were in charge, and the Hungarian soldiers, on the end, to help to put them. So in very good hands we were then. God saved me from that.

I didn't know that because they were fascists, all right? So can you imagine how good they'd done? They left us in the hands of the fascists, right? So when I woke in the hospital, they took me from the hips because I opened my mouth.

How did you end up on the heap before?

Because I didn't have really any more energy, I think. After when I hopped around with this very painful leg and everything, and I just--

Had you collapsed at some point?

--sat down, collapsed, sat down. And I was still working, my mind and my-- half sleeping, half up. And I just started to speak.

Had you returned from-- had you returned to your barracks after you'd had your hand--

It was all messy. It was all-- also the water wasn't open. The people started to attack the warehouses, the grown ups and who had some energy. They thought not from robbing. They robbed us out everywhere every time before.

So these clothes which were there, they were just our own clothes. And for food, the warehouses, they broke it up, and they wanted to go in, and they wanted to get new clothes. But not because of robbing for having the thing-- because of hygiene. And that's what they can't understand. Even then, the hygiene, it was more important than anything.

But the water wasn't there. And then they started to change their clothes. But you see, what they couldn't understand, that it was typhoid. It was lice. They deloused everything together, this beautiful Persian and ermines and what they robbed from everyone. It was there. It was worth a fortune for the Germans which was [? there. ?]

And they just went in on these heaps. And I tried to do the same, but I couldn't. And I went back, and I just collapsed. And I was speaking out when I saw soldiers around me, because I was aware of something happening, not German.

And they took me to this hospital because I woke then. And there again I was hysterical. I started to scream when I came to me. And I don't want any-- they explained me, I don't want to be experimented on. I don't. Because I heard German voices, you see? The good nurses and all, they came to help, yeah?

Did you know about these experiments on the Jews?

We knew and learned everything, yes. And I went to look for friends when I could hop and everything. It was all mess then. And I didn't understand that much what other people, but some people, they went still with this white. The Germans stood on. Some, they ran away. And when--

What do you mean this white, a white armband?

White, it means that they give up themselves before the camp was given over for the British, yeah? And then when they came in, then I was opening my eyes and talked, and luckily God helped me. I always believed it. And they took me off because they saw I am alive. And they took me to this hospital.

Who had put you on the heap?

Somebody when I was collapsed somewhere.

Someone had found you collapsed around?

And they just put the people on the heap. There were many alive. Believe you me. Believe you me. And anyway, these people who tried to change the clothes, first of all, they took back-- the British took back everything. They said there is no way that they can keep it, even if that was a mink or what, because it's lousy.

But at the beginning, I didn't understand it. I thought they are bad, you know? And other people, because they didn't understand it, that they must be all cleaned up.

So they had this hospital. And then I woke in that hospital on the procedure of delousing again and all, but in better condition. I started to scream because I heard German voices. And I said-- they tried to quieten me down and say what language I speak. I said, I speak German. I speak English a bit. I speak this. I speak that.

They started to explain me that they are not the baddest, you know, and all this. And I said, well, I don't want Germans still to touch me. I don't-- if it is true, I don't want any. Ich will nicht. Ich will nicht.

And then a nun came. And my father taught me a nun or priest I should respect always. And I agreed with the nun. Because you see, the education from the past, despite I didn't have went to schools. Hmm? It came back.

So and that was the end of it. Then I was in the hospital. They didn't want to give me a mirror. I had all sorts of illnesses and typhoid and went through that. And then one day-- well, of course I wanted to eat onion, and I wanted a mirror, because I saw on the other bed it's very clean, very nice. But I saw how they looked, yes.

Why did you want to eat onion?

Well, I always wanted to eat onion. And all the time that I was in the camp, I was craving for onion. And when I went to a farm where peasants were, I tried always to ask for onion someone when I could. And I didn't have anything to give for it, and I didn't have any anybody good I didn't meet in a farm that they would give it to me on farm.

But I was craving for this onion like mad. So they asked me what I would like, because they gave-- you see in the camp, in the meantime, Bergen-Belsen, many people died after the graveyards. They were put in the graveyard from eating.

Because they wanted to be good people, the Allies, and they gave them the tins of food. And if they gobbled it quick up

or they ate it quick because they were hungry, they just blown up the stomach and died. So I was saved from that by the mighty, because they took me to the hospital, and I was fed hygiene

And when I wanted onion, they said I can't have now because my stomach can't take it. But I will have a little. They give me just a tiny little. That was-- I wanted always onion. And since that day, I love onion. I can't afford in my social time not to eat it because it stinks, right?

And also I have a habit to have two loaves of bread at home, never to run out of bread.

Even today?

Even today, yes. Even today. Well, if somebody comes to my house, it's not for worrying for me. It's concern for others and is hungry. Some children go like my son in America round, and they are from good parents, and they have not enough money, and they come in my house, the first thing will be that I feed them.

And a professor from Poland, from a Catholic lecturer, came just over with 30 students. And he had food from-- they were placed in a-- don't know-- hostel, and the solidarity probably helped them. I don't know who, but they went out and got 10 pounds a day.

But the boys were looking the fruit. They couldn't afford to buy it. So that professor came. I invited him. He's very educated. Invited him to the Mikado, and I gave him a few good meals. And you know I was so happy to do that because there's no starvation, no. But he was really in the world where is everything here, and he could not afford, despite he came out from Poland, to buy fruit or things like that.

You said that they wouldn't give you a mirror when you were in the hospital.

Yeah, they wouldn't give me a mirror, no. They said, I have to wait a bit. And so I started to be a girl. I started to be wanting to know. And I must have been by that time 12.5 or so, you know?

What did you look like that prevented them giving you a mirror?

Because I looked like the next door. I looked like when you see these starving children in Ethiopia and in Bergen-Belsen on the film, when it was the liberation. Therefore I tell you, if someone looked well after the liberation, they must have been helping to the Germans because it can't be otherwise.

What happened? Did you see anything that happened to the kapos in that camp?

Well, they asked me. They found that women who did push my hand with the potato. Always I thought it was Irma Grese, and I don't know. I don't know, but they told me, Major Chutter, who wanted later to adopt me, who came to the hospital and picked me up because I was really-- he liked me. And when I went to down to Hanover, I was put in Bardowicker Strasse in a villa next to [INAUDIBLE] and baroness if it is true.

That's what she said her name is. And she was Hungarian, and her name was Illa. And I researched it in Germany. No, it must have been. It's true that it existed, [INAUDIBLE] baroness. And she was being a housekeeper because her husband apparently was a war criminal.

I don't know if it is true, but he told his name-- her name is like that, and I can remember her blue eyes and blonde hair. She must have been then-- to me, she looked old, but she must have been in her 40s. And I don't know whether it was belonging to this Baron Thiessen or not. I don't know. I never will know because this is not a film that I can tell you.

But it is true that when--

The woman who crushed your hand in the camp.

In the camp.

They found her.

Well, they found a few, and they wanted me to come to the jail and identify when I was better. And I didn't want to go. I said, no, I would not do to anyone anything. She could do to me. She could do to other people. I don't. I don't want.

Once in my life, a Jewish Kapo did bad, and I told her off because I felt that she will be ashamed because her father was a rabbi. I heard it from someone. But I think if these people done to me, they were not people that I should go and give it back revenge. Because with the revenge, I know in the Bible it is written eye for eye, tooth for tooth. But it's not so really. It's not so.

I didn't feel anything.

Was she a German or what?

Yes, yes. Well, they were all equals to me, these Germans. They looked all equal. But nowadays, I just couldn't do it. I just couldn't go. And not because I was afraid. I did not want to do harm to anyone.

I said, if God will punish her, it's God's will.

Who exactly is Major Chutter? Can you explain?

Major Chutter was the town mayor of Hanover. He's the one who's in the book.

And he came to visit the hospital?

Yes, and he found me there. And then he made arrangements to come to Hanover, because he had in mind to adopt me. I didn't know then, but later. And then his wife joined, joined him in '45. And he was put in another place, but he always cared for me and came because I was still '47 in Germany. Because until they found my parents-- because he took me off from the list, from the registrar that I was in private houses, a few private girls, and I was not registered properly.

And he regretted it always. I had a lot of problems from this because he put me down as I work in the Hanomag factory that I should get the ration. But I couldn't work because I was ignorant an alphabet. And they put to me somebody like Jeffrey to entertain me, to teach me a bit English.

Who is Geoffrey?

Geoffrey Lesson, who is in the book. Yes, reading the book.