

122, roll number 2.

Mrs. Brunstein, reel 2.

My friend's father was taken off the street one day and never returned. And my friend and her mother did survive. But whatever happened to her father was never known.

Then suddenly, you would see a poster. There were posters in the ghetto whenever there was something they wanted the population to know, that-- for allowing the light to be shown through the window, you would be taken to an unknown destination. And that way, they would get hundreds and thousands of people. And they would be sent away. And there, again, no one ever knew where to. And these people have never been heard of again.

The worst time in the Łódź ghetto was 1942. I think it was around September. For-- let me try to recollect. My mother was, at the time, in hospital. She suffered from malnutrition. And her whole body was swollen. And she couldn't walk. She was taken to hospital. And we could never see her there. For some reason, they did not allow it. Her head was shaven.

One morning, the woman we shared the room with-- I have not mentioned it, but at the time, things were happening. And there, again, they took away a street. And you had to go find another room. And then we had to share the room again. And I remember it vividly. She came in and said, you're sitting here at home, and they taking from the hospitals-- all people are being taken away.

And we knew, by then, what that could mean, if sick people were being taken. So I rushed to the street where the hospital was with my brother. When we got there, the street was cordoned off. We could not get to the actual street where the hospital was, but just outside it.

And we saw Germans with the big vans. People around me, everyone was screaming, crying. Everyone had someone-- either a child, a mother, a father. And I actually saw with my own eyes newborn babies being thrown down of windows onto the big lorries.

Who was throwing them?

Germans-- second, third floors seen on a big sheet, just thrown down. You would see the blood splattering. And I'd see the Germans laughing and joking. And I was beside myself. How old was I at the time? This was '42, so I was 14 years old. I remember running absolutely demented. And through back streets, we ran to the other side of the hospital.

And then I-- we ran home because you could not get to the place. When we got home, someone we knew came. And he said, your mom is OK. She has managed to escape. And she is with the [? Berkovicz ?] family.

So we got there. And indeed, my mother was there. And I said, Mommy, how did you manage? How did you do it? She said, I don't know, she says. And I don't believe in supernatural powers. But, she said, I managed to push the bars aside. And I got out. And here I am.

And then it was-- by the time evening came, we knew we could not go back to the same room because we were afraid. My mother had her head shaven. And we were afraid to walk through the streets. But we managed to get to another friend, who were nice enough. They were very close friends from before the war. And we stayed with them.

And somehow, my brother had disappeared. So my mother said, no, I cannot rest. We have to get out and see what happened to Perc. We managed, on the following day, to get back to our own room.

But after that, we were not allowed-- no person was allowed to leave the house for 10 days. They called it Gassensperre. I cannot think of the word right now, but it will come back to me-- curfew-- for 10 whole days. It was the beginning of the liquidation of the ghetto.

The Germans would arrive and go from house to house. The way the apartment flats were built in Poland, there was always a courtyard. So all the inhabitants, they'd come and just say, alle Juden, heraus-- all Jews out.

They would come and assemble all the people and just take all the old, the sick, and the very young. And of course, some families refused to be separated. So they'd go.

Well, it was impossible for my mother to show her face because she would have been taken straight away, although she was only 42 at the time. So we decided that it would be a safer way, probably, to survive if we split up. And splitting up meant that you-- simply one courtyard led on to another led on to another.

So my brother rushed through one place. And I stayed in one, and my mother in another. And somehow, at the end of one day, the three of us were together. At the end of the second day, the three of us were together. But so many of our friends, and relatives, cousins, and so on were taken.

Then one day, it was towards the end of the 10 days, they came. And we just felt, somehow, we have to do something. We cannot go down. We'll all be taken. And although we had no concrete evidence of what was happening, we just knew that if you're taken, you will never see the daylight again. I personally, at the time, had not heard of places like Auschwitz and Treblinka. But without having heard, we just knew.

So when they came on that particular day-- we lived on the third floor. And there was a loft. So we decided to climb up a ladder, and go onto that loft, and hide. There was one young family, husband and wife, who had a little girl. And they put the little girl in a laundry wicker basket, left her in that room. And they went up on the loft. You don't always have the presence of mind what to do, or what may be best, or safest.

We all went up there. And there must have been about 20-odd of us. We heard what was going on downstairs. We heard screams. We heard shouts. We heard crying. We even heard shots. If anyone sort of felt close to death or knew that this may be the last minute you look, or see, or live, or feel, there was-- this was the time that I have experienced-- and my mother.

We then, actually, heard the sound of the German boots walking up the apartment stairs-- first floor, second door. They were opening every single door. And they were getting people out, shooting, screaming. They came to the third floor. And one of the Jewish policemen with them-- you see, they did engage the Jewish police to help them.

And we heard the door, one door open. And we heard a child crying. And we just knew that this little girl was taken. And the parents were with us. And we just simply had to beg them-- hold them down, don't scream, don't make a sound, or all of us will go.

And then we even heard the Germans say to the policeman, go up those steps and see if anyone is up there. And we saw the men climb up the stairs. And he looked-- he saw us in the dark. And he said, no one is up there.

He knew very well that if the German decided to follow him, that all of us would be either shot at the same moment or taken. But he definitely would have been for having dared to lie. But he did it. Obviously, he had a lot of inner strength and a great feeling of mercy, compassion, I don't know. This is what happened. The German did not follow him. So once again, we had gained another day. By the way, that policeman survived, but his wife and child did not.

On the-- I cannot remember exactly which day it was, or whether it was soon after the 10 days-- it must have been-- a policeman arrived in our apartment. And he said, where is your mother? And my mother had to be in hiding all the time. I said, don't know.

I said, well, she was on the list in the hospital. And she's not there. And she's got to be there because the Germans have got lists. They demanding. I said, well, we don't know. So he said to my brother, well, I have to take you. So he took my brother.

I had to let my mother know. I ran to my mother. And I said, look, they've taken Perec. And she said, I have to go and let Perec come up. Just-- he's a young child. And if there is a chance to live-- I won't be able to live if they've taken him. So of course, as a child, I started crying. And I said, I probably can live without a brother, but I can't live without a mother.

And we found out where the place was where they kept all the people. And we ran there. And the same thing happened. There were thousands of people standing, screaming, crying. And my I had to keep my mother back and say, no, you can't go. If you go, I'll go. And then if Daddy survives, there'll be no one.

But there, again, I cannot explain the miracle. My brother actually escaped from a lorry by pretending that he was working there. Even now, I know, there were many miraculous stories. Even now, I just cannot imagine or believe that he actually could do it-- did it. And he is the one who is alive. He survived.

Anyway, after those 10 days were over, some kind of normality returned. Somehow, we managed to get, again, a ration card for my mother. And we carried on in the ghetto for another two years. By that time, people were dying, not just tens, but hundreds of people were dying daily from malnutrition.

And the-- it manifest itself in the form of being completely swollen. And you just stopped walking. People just could not walk. Their limbs refused to move. And there was nothing that could be done for them. I remember, at one time, going to a doctor. Yes, there were doctors in the ghetto. They could do little, but they had doctors. There even were hospitals.

And there was a woman in the surgery. And she was telling others that she had one daughter who was dying of TB. And there were three more children. And they were a very close family. So they tried to take some of their rations to give to the very sick child, hoping that this would help her to get better and survive.

And the doctor said to her, you must not take this responsibility upon yourself. Your daughter has got no hope. And you have to accept it, that she will not live. But the other three, you haven't got the right and neither have they. So this was the kind of situation you were met with.

Yes, people did it. In my own family, we did it. When someone was very sick, we tried to help, in the sense that you simply had less. And it was very hard because we would get a ration of bread for seven days, which would probably be enough, not even enough, for one day. And even doctors advised that, for people to weigh their own rations within a family, so that everyone gets at least what is allocated to him.

And of course, some people had-- just could never keep their ration for seven days. They'd say, at least one day a week, I'll get the feeling of my stomach being a little bit satisfied. So for an hour or so, I won't feel the dreadful pain of hunger, rather than having a little, and feeling the gnawing pain of hunger every single day.

Thing like potato peelings became very important. In fact, you had to have a doctor's prescription to go to one of the kitchens because everyone who worked in the ghetto was given a soup. So people were engaged in the kitchens peeling potatoes. And the potato peelings were then distributed on doctor's prescriptions.

And the fact that hardly anyone had running water, and the potatoes were very filthy, and most of the time, they were frozen anyway in the wintertime, you would have to go to a pump and clean those potato peelings in the cold weather. And then you just simply either cook them or mince them.

And we introduced quite a bit of humor. We used to do all kinds of things. We had one of the diets-- the food in the ghetto was coffee, in fact coffee husks. And a lot of people died because of them, because of what they did to the stomach. They simply put holes in the stomach.

From the coffee husks?

From the coffee husks. But we would mist the husks with the potato peelings and try to make little patties and call them

salmon patties, fish patties, all kinds of things so to pretend that we were actually eating some kind of food.

Did you laugh about it? Or did you take it seriously?

Oh, we met-- you had to laugh. Because if you didn't laugh occasionally, you-- none of us would have survived. And even at the times like that, we still used to meet, go to each other's houses. No one could offer you anything.

We used to sit in our coats. The only thing that could be offered would be just a little boiled water. No one had more. And we still used to read, and discuss, and talk of the time that the war will end. And no one will believe us. This is just-- it became a way of life which carried on and just hoped that you would survive.

What do you mean no one would believe you?

The outside world would not believe that we were reduced to that state, that the Germans could do this to people. We just somehow felt it even then. And it was so because no one believed us when we came out. No one believed us.

Did you have sufficient to drink or did you suffer from thirst as well?

No, there was water. There was water. We could get water. In 1944, the final liquidation of the Łódź ghetto took place. But before that, it would probably be important, maybe, to mention that not very far from the ghetto walls, we knew that something was happening there because we heard an awful lot of screams, cries, shots.

And we did find out that they were keeping Gypsies there. And they suffered the same fate as Jews. They were persecuted as much as the Jews. And the same was inflicted on them. We did not see them, no, no. But the sounds that we've heard, the screams, the cries, they haunt me till this day. We managed to feel for them as much as we felt for us.

In 19-- the beginning of 1944, my brother was taken. There, again, they assembled so many-- they wanted so many Jews. And his crime was-- they always had to find a reason. No one would go willingly. We say, we're sending you. So they would say, right, for someone who did so and so, someone who did so and so, you have to report at such and such place. And you were being sent out.

What do you mean someone who did so and so?

Well, like I mentioned before, the light was showing. So that was an offense. My brother was doing some kind of work. And as a punishment, I cannot remember exactly what he did and why he was punished.

But as a punishment, he was made to clear-- there were no proper toilets in most of the places. So we had whatever is called bogs, or bugs, or whatever. It had to be cleared. And this was cleared manually. So he was made to do that.

Then for this particular time, when they wanted so many people, at that time, they wanted young people. He was on the list. And he was taken too. And at that time, there was nothing that could be done. We ran everywhere. We tried, but nothing could be done. He was just taken. But luckily, he was taken to a place of work, which was in Czestochowa, in a-- to a munitions factory.

This is Czestochowa, near Kraków?

Yes, yes, Czestochowa. Czestochowa. He-- yes, he survived the war. He was taken there. And a day before the Russians entered, he was sent to Buchenwald. And I think just a few days before the Americans entered Buchenwald, he was sent to Theresienstadt. And he survived in Theresienstadt. But of course, the liquidation of the ghetto was in 1944.

Can you remember which month it was?

Yes. But another thing, maybe, which is interesting or of importance to say, that into the Łódź ghetto, very, very many transports were sent in. Łódź ghetto was one of the largest. It lasted the longest.

And it became a kind of concentration camp or concentration place. So a lot of German Jews were still being sent into Łódź-- Czechoslovakian Jews, Jews from other towns. And they did not have it quite so bad until they came.

And for them, it was almost impossible to get used to those circumstances. And they were the ones who died first, who really perished first. I think, if you're being slowly used to bed times, you somehow-- your body, your mind adjusts, and you learn to fight. If it is an extreme circumstance, you just can't. And they couldn't. They couldn't accept it, that-- they could not accept the hunger.

They would take out bowls of cold water and wash in the coldest weather outside. And there were-- because you couldn't wash inside. So they would wash outside. And they really were the ones who, en masse, perished in larger numbers than the ones who were slowly being given the doses.

In 1944, in-- it started, probably, at the end of August. By that time, I think, those people who had outside news, knowledge from radio, and so on knew exactly what was happening.

Accession number 9122, roll number 3.

Mrs. Brunstein, reel 3. Did any of the political parties existing in pre-war Poland continue to operate under the German occupation?

Oh, yes, all of them did-- the Zionists, the Bundists, the [NON-ENGLISH]. The party which my family were members of, the Bund, continued throughout the war, in fact, in every part of Poland. And they did organize help as much as they could. They took a great part, we know, in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

And it was through the leading members of the party that news would get to us of what was happening in the outside world. And we knew by then that things were coming to a close. And we were told that they were suffering defeat on the Russian front, that the Germans were losing. And it has every hope to survive.

And somehow, I, as a child, still hoped to be reunited with my brother, with my father, with all other members of the family, even those people whose families were taken away in the ghetto were hoping against hope that they would be reunited.

And we were saying to each other, so long as we survive, well, so we will tell the world. And they will know what can happen, how men-- how it is possible for one man to be inhuman to another man. And we shall have to do something about it in our own childish way.

And I do remember it exactly. We had a little group of about 10 people. We were talking about it, of the great things we will do, and organize, and bring knowledge to people, and enlightenment, and start a kind of missionary work-- not in a religious sense, but in a purely humanitarian way. Well, something of that is still within me.

The summer of '44, my mother, although ill, was still quite reasonably well. I became very ill with malnutrition. And I was taken to hospital. And then we heard-- or it was known that they were sending out daily transports of people. And they were saying that they were resettling them. I decided to leave the hospital because I wanted to be with my mother.

So I left the hospital. And my mother went back to the place where we lived. And one of the things that I somehow seem to be sorry to leave behind, if we were taken, was a little allotment.

And this is something which I just want to mention in passing, that they suddenly decided that people could grow things. So that was welcomed very much. But there was nowhere to grow them outside our own window. And we were on the first-- on the ground floor. There was just concrete paving, stones, concrete.

It's unbelievable to think of it now, but I by myself managed to hack away the concrete and the stones, and got some seeds, and planted them, and watched them grow overnight. When I saw them-- guarded it as soon as it started

growing. And even then, the sense of achievement for a 15-year-old girl was just so great.

I managed to get a few beetroots, and a few little onions, and a few little potatoes. Somehow, it seemed just such a miracle that I just think it's important. I have to mention it to my children just to see how important it was and then just to see the miracle of life, actually, in face of all the destruction of everything that was happening, of death every minute of the day. You suddenly see things sprouting, and they help you to live.

At the time, there were a few things growing there. And we were told that we would be resettled. But no one really believed. We did not know. It was the unknown. But we knew that this was the end, as such, of the life in the ghetto. So daily, they were clearing. They were just taking it, street by street and house by house.

They would come. They-- with the trams, there was one tram that would operate in the ghetto. It didn't operate for us. But the Germans could use it. And the day came when they came to our house. And my mother and I packed all the belongings-- yes, we were told by the authorities, by the Germans, to take all the things, and even cooking utensils, and the clothes because we would be sent to another place, where we shall be able to live.

We were taken to the place of departure to the trains. The Germans were standing there. And one by one, we entered. I just forgot the word. Excuse me. Can you stop it?

Well, actually--

And we were herded in to closed-in cattle trucks. I cannot tell you how many because it was as many as the truck would take. And as many as the truck would take with-- virtually meant almost one on top of the other. A bucket was put in the middle. And that was for our physiological use.

We were all silent. We did not know what to say because the sight that greeted us, the Germans, the people, the trucks-- we knew that we were not going to be sent to another place where to live. We did not know what. The train moved very, very slowly. We knew it was moving in one direction, and then it would stop and go back.

There was only one tiny, little window, which had bars on it. I stood on somebody's shoulders to look out. We could see nothing, just barren landscape.

People-- there were many elderly people, there were children. I didn't know how many, but there could have been 60, 70, 80, or 100 of us in the one truck. People became ill. People were vomiting. People were crying. You can imagine, in a very small, closed-in area, so many people herded together, somebody had a heart attack, died on the spot. We couldn't throw out the body.

There was no communication with anyone. The train never stopped, no one inquired. Many died that night. I was holding onto my mother. And we were still saying, well, maybe when we arrive, maybe it will be somewhere-- obviously this is-- must be very near the end of the war. We have to be strong. We have to survive. We had to survive. And we kept on saying, we have to survive. We have to tell others. We have to survive.

I cannot recall exactly how long the journey took, but I know it was a day and a night, probably another day, another night. And then finally, it came to a halt. I don't know how many were dead by the time we arrived, but very many. We had no drink of any sort whatsoever with us, only the little bit that maybe we took with us.

When we arrived, the doors were opened, the dead were thrown out, we walked out. And what greeted us is beyond description-- beyond description for an ordinary person like me.

We saw Germans. We saw barbed wire. I didn't know that it was electrified wire. We saw people who looked demented. We looked at each other. And we said, this must be a concentration of mad-- mental people. Surely that's not for us. We're going to stop here. They're going to take us somewhere else.

I actually saw what was an inmate, just there was the other side of the fence, run to the fence, touch it, and drop dead.

But it didn't make any sense. It just didn't. It was hell let loose. It was just a living inferno.

You couldn't think. We saw people who must have been inmates working and saying to us, you don't know where you've come to? You've never heard of Auschwitz? This is Auschwitz. You don't come here to live.

In fact, they were angry at us. They said, you mean you've lived up to now and you don't know where you are or what it is? You've never heard of it? We said, no, what is it? And before you could say anything, we were told to form in queues and just in rows. And as we were doing it, the Germans actually gave us a tin of meat.

And when you think of it now, it's just-- whether they were doing it to stop you thinking or just think that you're getting food, what the reason behind it was, I don't know. I have not been able to work out the German mind. And we were just moving and moving. And we saw just Germans standing.

And we realized that we're being-- that there was a selection committee. I was together with some friends who were taken at the same time, a mother and two daughters, and some three young women with newborn babies. I say newborn-- one was nine months old, one was six months old. And we were slowly moving.

And I was looking at my mother and said, well, this is probably the end. We have come so far, but we won't go any further, but still not quite believing it, still thinking that something was going to happen, that it cannot.

My own thoughts were this is not happening. This is not true. It can't be, just-- things like this just don't happen. And this is after having been through nearly six years of hell in a ghetto. What greeted us was something that you say, no, this is just not reality. Things like this just don't happen. I mean, we're talking about people-- these were not beasts. These were not man-eaters.

I do remember very vividly holding on to something. That was my mother's photos. I said, if anything happens, whatever, let's hold on to that. Maybe something-- maybe we can save something. This is-- there was no clear thinking whatsoever.

Then I heard someone say to me, say you are 18 or 19. Say you are 18 or 19. There is a chance. There is a chance. Don't say you are 16-- not knowing why or when. I-- it's stuck in my mind.

I don't know how long it took before we actually neared-- not the end of the queue, but coming up to the selection. As far as I'm concerned, it could well have been Mengele himself who was at the head of the selection committee because he was the one that did all the selections in Auschwitz. And he certainly was there when I arrived.

The two young women friends of ours were holding their babies. And one of the Germans picked up the baby and was handing it to the other side. And the woman just grabbed her baby and followed it. And there was a movement where they said to her, well, if you want to go, no one is stopping you. And so did the other friend.

And then it was just my mother's turn. She was just asked how old she was. And she said 44, which was her age. And she was just told to go to one side. And it was my turn, I was asked how old I was, and I said 19. And I was sent to the other side. I wanted to dash over there, but I was just simply stopped and pushed to the other side.

I remember clutching the photo and the little powder compact, which was my mother's. And the other friend with the two daughters, somehow, she did not let on that she was the mother of the two daughters. She came to the same side as I did.

And we were just led from there to a place. They said for us to have a bath. It's impossible for me, even to this day, to recollect exactly, step by step, what happened in Auschwitz, simply because it was so horrifying. And it is still so painful. Maybe something within me stops me to see every detail. But I just can't recall exactly.

But I know that I suddenly found myself in a room. We were told to strip. We stripped. And I do remember young German soldiers joking about our bodies. Even though-- no matter what was happening, I was only 16 at the time. And I

still remember those remarks, which I even cannot now repeat.

Then we were being shaven, which I think is quite a well-known fact. And then we were pushed into showers. And very hot water was poured on us. And we were made to stand under it. And then ice cold water was coming through the showers and then scalding water again. And we heard people laugh.

Then when this procedure was over and everything was taken from us-- my one photo, my mother's powder compact-- we were told to choose clothes that were put in front. There's clothes everywhere, obviously, from people who had come before. And all that was available, I remember myself, just some kind of skirt, which reached the ground, and a nightshirt, nothing else-- no shoes, or underwear, or anything.

And then we were put outside. And it was midday. And the sun was scorching. And our heads were shaven. And we were made to stand. We were not allowed to kneel, crouch, or anything, just to stand in rows of fives. We really felt that we could not survive. I used to say that-- my mother had just been taken that morning.

And when my heart-- I just knew that nothing good could have happened or would be happening to her. But what I just want to point out, that things were happening so quickly to your own body and yourself, that you couldn't even think of what was actually happening to your mother. And I know that I've sort of felt-- it's hard to believe, but actually, it happens to people.

And not because you're suddenly selfish and think about yourself, it's just, obviously, the human mind cannot take in everything. You just can't. Just know, this was something that-- what happened to my mother seemed to have happened 100 years ago. I even forgot that I had brothers, or sisters, or friends, all them.

We just-- so when the sun had gone, it became very cold. And that's how we were made to stand in the very same spot. Then we were marched into a very, very big barrack and made, again, to sit down in a row of fives.

And I do remember distinctly the greeting from a Blockalteste, which means one in charge of the barrack. I don't know exactly what nationality she was, but it would be Slav because I understood. And she said, you have all come here to die. And I myself will be instrumental to bring this about.

And as she was saying it, she was walking around with a big stick. She was just hitting us over our heads, just like that, for fun. She was dressed very nicely. She had hair, dressed. She looked very well fed.

Then they distributed some food, which was a container of soup-- one container for five. This-- I'm talking, this was the end of the day, evening-- one container for five, with no utensil whatsoever. So everyone could have a sip. And believe it or not, even I had this sip. No matter what happened to you, during this, somehow, you needed a sip of something warm. I had it and swallowed it.

We were then taken out of that block. We thought we had come at least to rest for the night. No, we were taken out of that block and led to some place which seemed like a field. And they made us spend the whole night in that field. This is all within-- I can't even remember now whether it would be Auschwitz or Birkenau.

We heard some Germans joking, and saying, and wondering whether we were hot enough or warm enough, whether we were well fed, whether we were going to have some nice dreams, whether we would like to sing, maybe, a little song or a lullaby. And although these were words and spoken, and somehow, they just had no impact. When I say no impact, yes. But one was so stunned that either you thought it was an unreal world or you just stopped thinking. But nothing just mattered. For that moment, nothing mattered.

The next day, again, I know that I was led from one barrack to another. I met a friend, a school friend, and she started crying. She said, they've taken my mummy. They've taken my mummy. I said, they've taken mine too. And then it all came out. And then we started crying.

And we looked at each other. And we said, oh, we were going to build such a nice world. Her name was Sonja. I still



remember. All her family perished. Then I met another friend's mother. And she said, they've taken my baby. They've taken my baby. But everyone had the same tale to tell.

And to this day, somehow, I feel very guilty because this Sonja, she did not survive. But I always, till now, I have the feeling that if I had grabbed her and I said, stay with me, maybe she would have survived as I did. Because for some reason or other, I was chosen. I don't remember if it is after a few days or after a few weeks. I really cannot remember how long I was in Auschwitz.

I know that at one time, I had to lie about my age again because they were saying that they were going to take children and put them in a nice children's camp. And then we were told by others who had been there for a long time, don't do it. Don't do it. Say you're older because when they hear that you are a bit younger, they're killing all the children. All the children will go into the gas chambers.

It was then that I had heard the first time. And that's the truth about gas chambers-- about the crematorium. And they showed me what it looked, where it was. I actually did see smoke rising.

And even though I knew that this is where my mother was taken, I did not believe it. In fact, after the war, I still hoped for her survival. I just couldn't. And it was there in front of me. Maybe it helped me to survive just not to believe or trying not to believe. Then-- is it again the end?