

Marsha Segall, reel 5. Marsha, you were just telling me about the clothes that were given to you, and we were talking about what provision was possibly made for personal needs, such as women needing provision for menstruation.

Well, none at all. There was no provision for nothing. No hygiene and no nothing for sickness. There was nobody to see about it. There was nobody to demand. Every hut had a couple.

At the time when we arrived, there were, from Hungary, Hungarian. I still remember her name. It was Magdus, and she was very cruel. And she was only waiting for excuses to hit. So everybody tried to be about 10 meters away from her.

What did you do about personal needs?

Nothing, because as far as I remember, perhaps, we had periods one time, but then it stopped. And that was general to everybody. So there is a trend of thought that it was-- we were given something. It was never substantiated, but it is very odd that nobody had periods. Perhaps it is because of the food or what we ate or the lack of vitamins or anything, but we only had it in the beginning. Nobody had it afterwards.

What kind of food were you given and how often?

Well, we had, in the morning, we had, like, wash-up water, brown one, which was cold coffee. And we had to drink it. It was very hot, given to us in iron dishes, and we had to drink it hot.

What happened if you didn't?

We had a kapo, a Pole, Max, and he was standing with a big stick and hitting over the head if you didn't swallow it. And then we had a tiny slice of bread and a tiny bit of margarine which was the first time that we ate it. Now it is used a lot but at that time, nobody knew about it. And we had sometimes, given a bit of jam, also very inferior quality.

And the soup was water, really, water with a potato or some grain or something. But we were terribly hungry.

Was there much rapid weight loss? Was there a rapid weight loss? Did people lose weight?

Yes. Well, not right in the beginning. You couldn't see it. But altogether, we changed rapidly to something different what we were. But it took some time, you know, a good couple of weeks.

In Stutthof, it was, we didn't live, and we couldn't think about anything, because we weren't left alone for a minute, not even to lie in the straw bunkers, which was with a gray, worn-out blanket. Because we stood almost the whole day on Appell.

Roll call.

Yes, and counted. They always use to count us, how many we were. And lots of people, they couldn't stand any more. And they used to drop.

What would happen to them?

Well, they used to be hit, and they used to put them down to stand. And it happened quite a few, who dropped dead. It's mainly older people, which they didn't weed out in the beginning. They did it afterwards and the gas. But in the beginning, we'd been all together.

Did you know they were gassing people?

No. But we knew that to be left out from everybody, to be picked out from so many, we knew that it, the meaning is not a good one. That it's either extermination or-- gassing we had it from the commandant that there is gas chamber. So we,

more or less, were aware that there is a crematorium. We knew we smelled it. We had always this funny chimney and this funny smell.

And the most horrifying sight was the shoes. There was pyramids, huge ones, of shoes of the dead people. And you almost could fit in people, according to the size and according to their fashion of shoes. It was from baby shoes and nicer shoes, high-heeled, low heeled. But it would be stacks of shoes that was outside the barracks, and that was a terrible sight.

How many people were there to a barracks?

The barracks had been terribly crowded, but I really couldn't tell you how many there were.

You mentioned the sleeping arrangements consisted of bunks.

Yes, wooden bunks and straw a bit, but it wasn't even a lot of straw.

Were these separate bunks or one long bunk?

There would be not one long one. Separate but the separate wasn't for one. It was more than one. You slept where you could find a place, really.

Did you sleep with your mother and your sister?

Yes. I mean, we tried very hard to be together and also with these other two women.

What did you do during the rest of the day in the camp when you weren't on the Appell, the roll call?

Waiting for something else to come. Because we've been counted. We've been looked over. We've been sent to do cleaning. I mean, we'd been always shouted at, always given orders. But perhaps it's a good thing because we couldn't think much.

And then we used to be exhausted, absolutely exhausted, standing in the heat. And we had very little sleeping time. And all we had this Magdus shouting in rage or Max or hitting somebody. And what he did is something. He took a little girl, a child, which we managed to smuggle through, and he hung her on his belt.

Can you expand on that?

Well, yes. Well, she was running around, and she went to rooms where she wasn't supposed to go. So he grabbed her and he says, well, this child will be killed in any case, so I'd better shorten her life. And he, in front of us, he took her and he hung her on his belt.

He took his belt off and--

Yes. Yes. Well, he was an animal. I think he was ill. He wasn't normal. And usually-- he was a criminal. Because in the camp, there were criminal prisoners, as well.

Were most of the kapos were criminals.

Yes, and they used to make kapos from the criminals, too. We've been called political. I don't know why. But we had red triangles, which was a red stripe. Men had a red stripe in their trousers, which meant political. Pink was homosexuals, and green, criminal.

Were the men and women in separate barracks?

Yes, always, very much so. But we did see the men before they had been sent out to Dachau. I saw John once. And I saw also, before there had been exterminated, some who tried to escape from a ghetto in Kovno and been shot and had amputations of the legs. They had been given brooms to walk.

Why were their legs amputated?

They tried to run away from the ghetto and was shot, and the leg was amputated. I'm talking about somebody I knew very well. And I saw him the first time. I hadn't seen him for years, because he was in Kaunas, and I was in [NON-ENGLISH]. And I saw him through the wire, and he was sort of jumping on a broom. But they killed him. He was gassed. Anybody who couldn't work.

They took all the men to Dachau. All fit--

The able, yes. But also, when John was sent to Dachau, he was with his cousin, the cousin's nephew, and another friend, they knew very well. And he tried to smuggle through his youngest son, which was under 12, and he wasn't tall. But they took him out, and he didn't survive.

Otherwise, he was, in a way lucky, because his wife and his two daughters survived. This is one of the more or less whole families that I know. Because it was very rare that a whole family survived.

How long were you in Stutthof?

About three to four weeks. I mean, time didn't matter. We didn't know when a day, how long days. We didn't know the date. We didn't know what day it was, whether it was Sunday or Monday or Tuesday. It was one big horror. And we didn't know what the next morning will bring and where are we going to be and where are they going to take us.

I had also a special very bad experience because somehow, whenever they made a group of 100, they used to make it in 100s to send out to work. My number was omitted. And I was separated from my mother and my sister.

Why was this?

Mistake, but it's nothing I could do because when I told them, they didn't want to know. And perhaps, in my case, it would have been much better if I would have remained in Stutthof, because the able women who remained, they sent quite a few to factories, which was on the roof. And some, who I met after the war, who remained in Stutthof, were sent to factories. And they had it better than working outside and fighting the elements of nature.

So your mother and your sister--

I exchanged with another woman, who went to another 100. And I gave her my marching ration.

So that you could--

Food so that we changed the numbers.

And you were then with--

She was with my mother. So she went in the other. She remained, and I went instead of her with my mother and my sister.

And what happened then? Were you then leaving Stutthof?

We have been given a ration, and we've been leaving by foot. We marched. And we didn't know where. It was summer. It was a very long march, but we still have been, it was the beginning. I mean, we still had some strength.

But for me, it was very bad because that was actually the first terrible migraine headache that I had on arrival. We arrived in a field with lots of tents, and women already have been there, who came before us.

How long had you been marching?

From Kaunas, they've been there a few days before. And they erected the tents, and they had a makeshift kitchen. Actually, not really. The food they used to get from German army food in big containers. And that was the only time that we had more or less food. Because we didn't have our own. And we've been there a short time, about three weeks in this particular place, which was in a forest. And we dug trenches.

You spent three weeks in these tents.

They moved around the whole time.

How did you dig the trenches?

With a shovel and pick.

And it was all women.

All women.

What time would you get up in the morning?

About 4:00.

How long would you work for?

18 hours.

How did this affect the women? Were there many casualties?

Not in the beginning. We've been in very beautiful forests, and we used to find the berries and after rain, mushrooms. And they used to let us about 15 minutes rest, and when you've been lying on the grass and looking at the beautiful pine trees, you had the illusion that you are somewhere else. But the reality was it wasn't a picnic at all. And it was summer, so we didn't feel cold.

How was your mother coping with this work? How was your mother coping with this work, this heavy labor?

She was coping better than I am, because I mean, she tried to build up her spirit, especially in my younger sister. And she had a very cheerful disposition always. And she proved herself being terribly strong.

How was morale between the women?

In the beginning, we tried to. It was perhaps, a lot of us knew each other. And also, when we met up with the women from Kaunas, well, I met a lot of students that I went University together. So we tried to recite poetry in the evening, lying in the tents.

But our waking up was rather in a most peculiar way. Because what they did, they used to come with a stick and hit over the tent. As our heads were very near the edges, sometimes we used to get hit in the head, shoulder. That was the way of waking up. They used to go through the rows and just hit over the tents.

Would this result in any serious injury?

To be honest, nobody knew and nobody cared. And then very few admitted because we, at the time, we knew already that the only way of keeping alive is to be well. Because if you couldn't cope or you couldn't do or you couldn't work or you been behind, you were either sent back to Stutthof but not back to Stutthof camp but to Stutthof gas chamber, because they didn't need you anymore.

You were not an asset at all. And they couldn't use you as a working horse. They couldn't use you for anything. So that we learned very soon that one should not have a headache. One should not be ill. I mean, my headache did cost me a lot because when we came, we had to run and to grab straw. And usually, I was the one in our family who used to organize food or straw or anything. And if I was incapacitated, we had very little.

How deep were the trenches that you were digging?

Well, somebody from the army used to come and they used to map out right in the middle of forest or something that where they were going to dig. And we just were given a spade and a pick, and we had to start digging. But we had to make a norm. So much per day and whatever it took. I mean, there was no time limit.

You'd work till they were satisfied.

No till, I would say, if they decided that 100 meter had to be done this day at this depth and width, we had to do it. And it's amazing how one does it. Because in other places, people have been brought on. They've been told that they're going to build a factory. And they thought, how? But at the end of it, with hundreds of dead, they did.

That was actually in the first camp. There was one SS guard who used to bring me, out of the blue, throw me in the tent, some bread. And apparently, he wanted to make my lot easier, because every one of them picked up somebody that they wanted to give them a more responsible, in brackets, job to make their personal life easier.

Because when we arrived, there was already a camp eldest, which the Germans allocated, somebody we knew but she wasn't helpful at all. She looked after her own affairs. All of them did look after number one, after themselves. And they had already people who helped to bring the food. It was already all allocated when we arrived, because we came three days late.

And when we dug the trenches, the same SS man came. And he told me to get out of the trench, which we dug already. And he said, he asked me to watch how they dig and to see that the women who are inside the trench should finish their allocated norm of digging per day, and I'll be responsible. But that will enable me to do nothing, and I won't have to dig or work physically hard.

Well, I had a look at the trench. And I saw my working women, and there had been a lot of mothers of my friends and older people. And I thought it is an impossible task he was asking me, because I was more fit and able to do it as they did.

And I declined. I said, I can't make them work faster or harder. So he just kicked me back. And he said, well, if you don't want it, so you'll have to join them. And he found somebody else who was quite willing to do it.

He was asking you to be a couple well that how that how kapos started. We didn't know what he was asking. Well, what he offered me is something more lazier and easier work, but it wasn't acceptable.

And from this, it developed two kapos because the ones who supervised the work have given other tasks to collect the picks and the spades when they came back from work. They had better-- when coats arrived or something, they had the first choice. They had the first choice of shoes. They had the first choice of food.

And eventually, it led to separate-- when we came to the camps, where they have separate rondavels, they were housed in separate rondavels. They had better food, and they have been befriended by the guards, by the SS guards.

How long did you stay at this place, the camp with the tents?

Well, we stayed till it was finished, the work, the digging. And then, they took us in trains because we were shifted further on. And that was only one time have we traveled in a normal train.

And this experience, I'll never forget, because we forgot what it is normal life. We didn't think it exists anymore, because we had been so cut off from normal life that we didn't believe it exists anywhere. And we passed the German town of Elbing, in Prussia, and also later on, Strasbourg.

And it seemed to us, we saw houses and people sitting on balconies and terraces. And it looked terribly odd. We just couldn't believe that people look normal. They dress normal and behave normal.

What we did was also something which is incredible. We almost dismantled the train.

Why?

Because we took off the little curtains from the windows, because we had nothing. We never saw a little piece of material. We took the string, where you put luggage. You know, the small packets there was from string lashing.

[INAUDIBLE]

Yeah, we dismantled it. We took it off. Some even, if they could, ripped the upholstery. Because it was like vultures, really, because we haven't seen anything, string, material. We picked up strings which were left, foot strings because everything was marvelous. Because we lived like in Stone Age. We just had nothing, absolutely nothing. Nothing that, I mean, the lowest human being is supposed to have.

Were there any reprisals from the SS because of this damage to the train?

The only reprisals were that they never took us with a ordinary train. We've been always, after that, given cattle trucks.

How long were you on the train?

Well, about six hours.

Where did it take you?

Took us to Polish territory because actually, Stutthof is really near Danzig, near the free state Danzig that was. But they took us to Liepe and to near Torun.

I don't know whether I pronounce it even properly, because all the Polish towns have been called in German names. When I look at a map now, I don't recognize it. Again, because now it's all what they are in Polish. But it is Bydgoszcz because that I hear on the radio quite often.

And really, we came nearer and nearer the Vistula and the river branches of the Vistula. Because there where they hoped to defend, the Germans, on the Vistula. Because the Russian army was on the borders of Prussia, on the outskirts of Warsaw, but they stopped there. And they expected a offensive any time.

Were you aware of how close the Russians were?

We were aware because we used to see people, refugees, running. And we'd been always told that we should not be happy. That if the war were finished 12:00, we will be all dead at quarter to 12. That we heard always, and then we used to hear abuse, from morning to night, that we are rubbish. That we are worthless. That we are nothings.

That after a time, you start to believe it. Because they just drill you in, you know? You hear it all the time that you think, perhaps, it's true. But they also were right about killing us because very few survived the 12:00 at the end of the war.

What happened when you reached the banks of the Vistula?

Well, we have the last camp we've been in rondavels. and that was the worst camp, because it was already cold. Because in this part of the world, the winter sets early. It's east north, and it's very cold early.

This is the camp you just traveled to on the train?

That's the last camp. We'd been changed from one to the other, but the last camp, it was plywood rondavels. And we slept in two shifts. One was with a wooden, round, halfway, and others slept underneath with a little stove in the middle, which wasn't warm enough.

We also didn't have anything to burn. We were not given wood or anything. Sometimes, we used to bring some twigs, hidden, or leaves or something to burn. And we also, by digging, we sometimes dug out raw potatoes. And we used to cut them and bake them on this little oven.

Marsha Segall, reel 6. Marsha, you were telling me about rondavels, the last camp you were at, on the Vistula.

The last camp was already the hardest. Here, we started losing people every day.

What time of year was this?

It was end of November and December, because it was winter. And the soil was hard, frozen, and it was snowing. We had very little clothing and very little food. And we'd been away from town or from anybody. It was from nowhere to nowhere. And even the SS, they suffered cold. And they used to put under their very heavy black coats, newspapers, because it's insulation. But if they saw somebody of us having some papers, they used to rip it.

And they used to wake us very early. And they insisted that we're doing exercise, which will keep us fit and warmer, when nothing could keep us warmer because we had no clothing.

How many of you were there?

Well, we'd been a good couple of hundred. And then we used to give them the spade and the pick and send out to dig. They made fires for themselves to warm their hands, but they wouldn't let anybody come near it

And the thing was that we never could get rid of the cold because the rondavels were so cold. There was no heating. We had no blankets. I mean, everybody had one gray blanket, which was very thin, worn, old. And we slept more tight together that each body warmed the other one. We protected each other but that was the most miserable camp there was, because we didn't have hope anymore.

What did you do about sanitation at this camp?

Well, sanitation, they used to dig big holes. It was in this camp we had a lot of dysentery. And the whole camp was dirty because some women couldn't manage to run quick enough to the dug out holes. And next morning, when they used to find it dirty, the SS used to beat up the whole rondavel which were near some dirt.

And we started to be infested by lice, which we didn't have before. Because we tried very hard, as long as we could, to wash our hair in the coffee water. Instead of drinking it, we used to wash our hair. And we tried very hard to keep clean as much as it was possible.

But when it was cold, it was impossible, because nobody could take off their clothes. It was so cold that you couldn't do it. And also, we didn't have any resistance. And lice is a combination of dirt and that the body have got no resistance. And we knew that if we saw somebody lice and if we saw a woman who didn't lace her shoe that she's a goner.

Why lacing her shoes?

Because that was apathy. That she didn't care. I mean, she didn't care what happened. And it was like a sign. And it's funny that the name given to these people was, in all camps, the same also, we've been hundreds of miles apart. We used to call it a Muselmann. We don't know how the name came, who created the name and how it spread from camp to camp.

And it means somebody who's--

Somebody who is about to die. I mean, he's already, he's got no resistance. He's already finished. He couldn't even lift a spade or anything. But we didn't have it till the last camp. But in the last camp, it was already, it was accumulation of hunger, hard work, sleeplessness, lack of vitamins, lack of medicine, lack of everything.

Would you have to go far from the camp to the place where you'd dig the trenches? Was it much of a distance?

Quite a way off, yes. And I mean, when we came back from digging the trenches, I mean, people used to throw the pick and the spade. It was like a collecting place. And a kapo used to take it.

And if you didn't give her in the hand, she used to hit you over the head with it, because they didn't want even to bend and pick it up. And you just went automatically to your rondavel and you just slump on the bunk. And you didn't even want to eat what there was. So we were terribly hungry.

What food was available at this time?

They used to give us like big radishes. The food was also getting from bad to worse, because there was no supplies. And I suppose at that time, all of Germany had less food than before. And what came to us was hardly nothing.

We still used to get a bit of margarine and sometimes jam, which was like a delicacy. And what there was food, the best part of it, the kapos and their helpers used to come. So we used to get the leftovers

Had you lost much weight by this time?

Very much. But I was lucky in a short period. I became a wood chopper. And I was chopping wood with two permanent wood choppers, which used to chop the wood for the kitchen and for the guards.

Were the permanent wood choppers also inmates of the camp?

Inmates of the camp. But that was a good job, because it was inside the rondavel and they didn't go to dig. And there were big logs. Used to chop it and we used to also, what do you call it? To--

--saw.

Saw, yeah, and they needed helpers. And a very good friend of mine and myself were sent there. And our tragedy was when they told us they don't want us because we don't know how to do it. And they needed helpers. So we begged them that we'll learn and would they give us a chance to stay?

Because what it meant was that all these big radishes were stored there. So we could pinch, each of us, a big radish and bring it to the families, bring it to my mother and my sister. So that meant more than actually being under the roof. And they tolerated us. For how long, I don't know, because we haven't been very long there. Because we were sent out to the march. So I don't know how long.

Then the condition and the dirt and the lice were so bad that they brought a fumigation unit. And the mistrust to the fumigation unit was so great that nobody-- they told everybody to leave their things and to be inside that nobody wanted to go inside.



What did you think it was?

Well, we thought that it's a gassing unit, but actually, they needed us and they wanted us to work till we drop dead. And the lice, they were frightened, will bring disease, and they will get it, catch it from us. So they brought, it was really fumigation. And some of the clothing became as hard as leather. They couldn't put them on again.

Because of the--

Because of the--

The spray.

Of the spray or whatever chemicals they use. And also, they didn't manage to fumigate all. So the ones with the fumigate were the lucky ones, because they got rid of lice.

Were you fumigated?

No, they didn't reach us, our rondavel, because we've been sent out to the march much quicker than the SS thought. Because they got, all of a sudden, the order from above that the Russians advanced, had advanced very fast. They started the big offensive in mid-January. And instead of leaving us, it happened in some camps that they left and they ran.

The guards.

Yes. They took us with, and in the beginning, it was terribly difficult to escape, because they used to count us. We used to sleep in the snow, in barns, and it was very carefully guarded.

How did you go? On foot?

On foot, oh, yes. But it was already an epidemic spread of typhus before, and some have been left. They didn't take them. They left them in one rondavel, all of those who were ill. I know a few, who voluntary stayed. Well, we knew that they wouldn't be alive. And we begged them to come with us.

And I remember a very primitive Hungarian girl, from Munkacs, in Carpatho-Rus told me, I'm not going. I said, please. What do you want to die here? She said, look, do you see the weather outside? How far do you think you'll march? I'd rather die on this spot.

She was clever because she was liberated, in a few days, and she was alive. But I'll tell you, they were meant to die. And the ones who were left when we marched off, they all got death injections. I don't know whether you know about it. But I know quite a few have got marks of it.

What the Germans didn't realize, that they had to inject it in the veins, in the blood. And as they were not doctors or nurses, they injected anywhere. And some, by accident, they injected in the right place, died. But the majority survived, but they have got burns, flesh burns.

Where they were injected. What was it they were injecting? Do you know?

No, I don't know, but it's something which burns. I, perhaps, could find out. But I know one has got like a big pockmark, all burned. She lives in Tel Aviv, in Israel. And I know she never wears short sleeves. And another one, who lives now, in Frankfurt. She got on her leg, at the thigh, there are big burn, big marks. Because actually, they were supposed to be killed.

And the rest of you marched.

They didn't look for the results, because the Russians have been on their heels. They injected them and left them and joined the marchers, the SS.

And what happened to them was that they had been hysterical, all of them, because they thought that's the end, which was meant to. And then they found out that they are still alive. Some died but some died because their disease went, already, beyond help.

What happened to you?

I marched. We went out on the march.

Where were you marching to?

We didn't know. It was in snow. We didn't march on the roads. In the beginning, some, but afterwards, when we encountered army, which moved from place to place and tremendous amount of German refugees, from Prussia, who ran, they didn't let us march on the roads. We marched on the fields, and that was terribly difficult to walk, because it was plowed soil with bumps, frozen. So it was really a tremendous effort to walk on it.

And when you realize that we had no food, because every time they thought, they said that if you come in the next town, they'll manage to get. We didn't have even water. We used to eat snow and that makes you more thirsty.

You get like snow mad. You have the snow and you're on your-- we made ourselves some sort of gloves from the blanket. On this dirty, gray piece of blanket, we used to take some ice and snow and lick it. But you get more thirsty from it. You want to drink more.

And we had no food at all. And whenever we came in the next place it was already empty. It was evacuated. There was nobody there. And the Russian Katyushas, you know, zooming from one side to the other. And the SS didn't even know where are we going, whether it's Russian occupied or German.

Were they panicking at all? What was their thought?

We were very unlucky, a lot of kapos in their death march got up in the morning and there was no guards. But ours took us right to the end, to Praust. And we used to lose, daily, tens and tens of women from exhaustion, who used to fall behind in the snow and frozen. And they used to be, they used to shoot them.

They'd be frozen.

Frozen, exhaustion, everything together. They just couldn't move anymore. And they used to, if you fell in the snow, you couldn't get up anymore.

Did many people get frostbite?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yes, the majority.

Did they know what was the matter with them?

Yes.

How did they react?

You can't move. I mean, when I froze my hands, I couldn't move. I wanted to do something, and I realized that my fingers are stiff. I couldn't bend them. And no matter how much somebody rubbed it, it didn't help.

How long--

Now I know remedies. People told me what you do, but I didn't know it at the time.

How long would you march for each day?

We don't know how much we marched. We marched from one barn to a second one, where they decided to stop at. And the worst day was actually the night before was my lucky night before I had my frostbite. That we've been in a estate, a Polish estate, a big estate, and there was lots of army stationed there. And they had anti-aircraft guns.

And the kapos always used to go with the SS. You don't have to count on them like ordinary prisoners. They all survived. But we've been in a barn, which was a tragic and happy.

What was happy about it that I was picked out with another few to bake potatoes. But that was inside, next to an oven. To have a potato to give because we didn't have food for about six, seven days. So I was inside, in a warm place. So that was very rewarding. And I could have some more potatoes for my mother and sister.

But what was tragic about this place was that first of all, the roof was broken. And when it snowed in, it covered you with snow. And then two women, lying next to us, stole our little bit of margarine and the gloves that we made. And that was this because we didn't eat the margarine. But we used to rub in the hands as a protection because it had an element of fat. And that was gone.

And the next day was a terrible blizzard. And we laid up. They didn't know exactly whether you should march or shouldn't march and then they decided to march. And I don't know whether you experienced a blizzard, because it hits in your eyes, and you don't see. And it's a wind with snow, which cuts in your face. And you don't even feel the cold because you try so hard to look because you don't see anything.

And in the middle, right before it was the end of the march for this particular day, then when I tried to help mother and I realized that I can't bend my finger. Because I had no margarine to rub in and no gloves. And Mommy had bits of frostbite.

Where? On her hands?

Well, we had everywhere, hands, face, I had really. But the face is not so dangerous because it's muscles. So you get black and it cuts off.

But when we came to the next town, in a barn, in a town, it was the whimpering and the crying, and the misery was something which was unbelievable. Well, I was sure that that's my last day. And I still ask somebody that if she'll meet anybody of my family who survived or my husband to tell them, you know, where I perished.

And we, from this place, without any help whatsoever, you could also, the town was buzzing with German refugees, who ran from the Russian onslaught. You couldn't get out to get any help. And we didn't think, didn't enter anybody's mind, the way we looked like, with our dresses the funny ones, and the shoes, and the and the blankets, disheveled and dirty, that we could have mingled with the refugees and to remain. I mean, it didn't enter our mind. I think some could, but we didn't imagine we could pass of anything. And from there, we marched still. I marched still one day with frozen feet and hands.

Were you in pain from the frostbite?

Not the beginning because you are numb. When it swells, it gets black and it swells, pussy. Then when it starts being terribly painful but not in the beginning. You don't feel at all.

And when I came to the next place, one came up to me, which I used to speak to her always that we have to escape. And she said, look, I think today is the day, because you won't make it another day. And you've got nothing to lose. She says,

I'm going. If you want, I promise you, I will take you along. And my mother and my sister urged me to go, because they knew I wouldn't make it if I go one more day.

And we crawled out from this barn, and we went into another one because it was quite a lot of farmers. And we've been four of us. In the straw, we've been hidden in huge stacks of straw till they marched off. But that was already that day they couldn't count, and they couldn't know who was or who wasn't because we lost three-quarters of the women.

Through death.

Yeah, I was told afterwards what happened to my mother and sister, after the war when I met people who were brought to the last place which was Praust, which was they couldn't go back to Stutthof. So they brought them to Praust. And there was epidemics of typhus. That my mother was, when she was brought, she was already a near-dead goner. And actually, they didn't shoot her. But they put her on a cart, and then she died there right away, on the 7th of February.

And my sister died of typhus. I don't know the date but I know somebody from a family, a second cousin, who she was brought with her mother. Her mother didn't survive, either. From another camp, from all the camps, the marchers were brought to Praust. But that I didn't know already, because I walked out from the barn with this particular girl, who told me that I should come with her.

Two of them remained, and they didn't know. They were frightened to move out. They also were afraid to stay there, because the farmer was in the house. So they didn't know what kind of a farmer it is, whether it's a German. Was it a Pole? Whether it's positive or negative, whether he would help them or what. But they remained. I believe they did help them. And they did find them. And they did help them, but one died of them and one survived.

And the two of us walked out, and we simply went to houses begging for help. And it was a lot of Polish territory, really, and they were terribly afraid to keep us. So they perhaps would let us sleep the night in a outbuilding or something and tell us to leave next morning.

Were they shocked at your appearance?

Pardon?

Were the Polish people with whom you stayed shocked at your appearance?

I don't know whether they've been shocked. They've been, really, I think they knew what was going on, because in this territory, there have been so many women from camps that it was a sight that I think they saw before. And they looked, to us, remarkably beautiful, all of them. When I think of it, I thought they had been all raving beauties, because they they've been cleaned. They've been normal. They had their hair brushed. And I mean, they looked themselves. And in our eyes, they've been absolute beautiful people.

Was it difficult for you to walk?

They gave us some food, but they wanted to get rid of us as quick as possible. We should not stay. And the girl I went out with could speak Polish. She was from Vilnius. So actually, she was brought up and lived most of her life in Poland, till '39.

And she was also not-- she was all right. I mean, all right in a way that she didn't suffer from any frostbite, and she had all her limbs. And I told her that she doesn't have to sacrifice her life for me, because I didn't know whether I would live in any case.

And she left me in a big estate, where there were a lot of Russian women, Russian women camp but not a concentration camp, a working camp. They tilled the land. And they had been brought, I think, from all parts of Russia.

And I could speak Russian because that was my mother's mother tongue. And the young ones didn't want me. I

remember it so clearly. But the eldest, they had like an eldest of the camp, she said, well, what do you chase? How do you know that one of our girls doesn't walk around like this?

She was a remarkable woman. She tore off my dress, which was absolutely filthy and full of lice. And they gave me a cotton dress. She didn't dare to open the shoes because that, you had to cut. But she opened the bandage. And then I saw the state of my hands.

And the Russian woman was probably older one, had experience. She knew what frostbite is. Because she told me something which I remember till today. She said, well, if you have medical help now on the right hand, your thumb will remain, and you'll be able to do your washing. I remember it clearly that her mind was on the washing. What physical work I would be able to do because there have been all peasant women. She didn't think of any other work.

And she said there is a German unit. If you speak German well, I'll take you and you speak to them. Perhaps you will be able to get medical help. And she took me to them. And I spoke. They really didn't know who I was because they didn't see camps. They didn't know that there are camps around or marches. And there have been soldiers.

And when they heard me speak, they saw that I am one of Prussian refugees who got frostbite. And they told me that they will-- that I am a German and--