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Can you describe further work at Auschwitz?

Yeah. The trains that came in with the building material, 100 weights of cement, thousands of bricks, trucks loaded with coal and other materials for building and renewing parts of the camp. For instance, unloading a wagon full with hundreds of cement went like this.

You queued up, and then you went to the edge of the wagon. And in the wagon, one or two prisoners, and who lifted hundred weights of cement onto your shoulder. And you took it on your shoulders, and you walked away with it, and deposited it elsewhere where it was necessary.

Now, if you were a tall fellow and your shoulders met the edge of the truck, it was not such difficult to put the bag on your shoulders. But me being short, I never reached there where the edge of the truck was. So it came down as a bang on my shoulders, a drop on my shoulders. But still all the same, don't go through your knees. You got to walk away with it and deposit it where it was.

Well, that went off and on.

Were these trains coming into the same place as the people came into Auschwitz?

Yes, they came into-- no, the outside. Outside, of course, the camp was being enlarged. So the trains didn't come actually into the camp-- outside the camp. And I think most of the time, as I've experienced, there was no man or no locomotive. They only came to a certain part of the camp, and then we prisoners had to queue up on both sides of the trucks, put our shoulders against the edges of the trucks, and push while the kapos went along with their sticks and the kicks, which they gave us, to push the load of trucks, 10, 20, 30, trucks, bit by bit along the way where they could be placed and then unload.

Into a railway siding.

A railway siding. And that siding went somewhere on the field, where the stuff was required. And if you weren't pushing, and it must have been always somebody who didn't want to push, and the kapo happened to catch your eye-- his eye on it, he came over, and he kicked you. Many a time I was pushing. I never-- let myself-- Let me do it in case in case they do spot me not doing it or whatever it may be.

Let me do it, and many times it appeared as if I wasn't. And then a kick, I remember one kapo, they called him the black kapo. He had a black triangle on his uniform. He was a very bad man, and he came over to me and kicked me in my side, my kidneys. And the same man made me unload all by myself a truck of porcelain pipes for groundwork. Yes, all by myself non-stop.

What was the weather at this point? It must have been summer.

Summer was nice, warm. Summer was all right. Well, so far as the weather concerns. You--

No, I just thought it might be hot.

Yes. Yes, it was hot, and wasn't no water to drink. You couldn't just walk away and have something to drink. There was always an SS on the tower watching you. One thing I remember-- that if you want to go to into a hut where you could urinate or what you had to do, you had to go-- I usually went behind the tower, the watch tower of the SS, and I came back the same way. Go in there, you probably stayed away longer than necessary, your so-called rest.

Then you came back. But there was one afternoon that I did the same, and I didn't know that the SS was a different SS man. And I had gone about three meters past him when I heard a shout, and I looked around. And the SS was calling me back.

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I came back, and he came down the ladder, and he stood in front of me and said, where are you going? I said, I'm going to the lav. He says, where? I said-- he said, why don't you walk in front of the tower. I can see you.

I said, I always walk this way. Sorry. And this went all in broken German. And he slapped my face. And then he pointed me to get on. And I felt insulted, being slapped in the face by an SS. Because every time I could walk behind, and nobody ever said anything about it. Well, you forget those incidents.

During the day, whilst you were doing this heavy labor, were you allowed to have an official rest, or were people expected to work continuously?

Continually you work. It was bad, because if the kapo or SS was watching you for an hour or so, you worked nonstop. You walked to the wagon. You got your bricks or your cement or whatever it was were unloading, and you walked to where you had to deposit, and you walked back again, and you went on and on.

But there were moments, of course, that the kapo wasn't there. And then you walked slowly, or you hid yourself behind a heap of bricks if possible. But obviously if you wasn't caught. Punishment always came after if you was caught. And that's how you tried to prolong life, really, and try not to lose a lot of energy.

How long was your working day?

Well, you got up at half past 4:00, quarter five or earlier. You queued up for your so-called breakfast. Then the gong went in at 6 o'clock. You stood on the square and being counted. And then after being counted, the sign was given. You marched out, and at about 7 o'clock, you was on the place where you had to work.

You finished between 12 hours, 12. You had a rest where the containers with soup came onto the field. You had your half an hour rest then, your food. You laid down on the field, whatever it was. Fell asleep or what, and then the shout came. Come on, work.

And then you was awake, and you worked again until about in the summertime half past 4:00, 5 o'clock in the winter time, much earlier, according to how soon it got dark. And you marched back to camp. Marching in, you were counted for. I mean, the kapo shouted out, and so many, his number in his commando, and so many prisoners. And they had done that in the morning, so it had to be the same. God help us there was one missing.

And then you went into your barracks, and you washed your head or your hands or whatever it was, and you queued up for your portion of soup. And that was it. If the kapos left you alone, that is.

Things jump into my mind now. There was one evening we marched back, and the kapo of the barrack, he said, right, before we dole out the soup, I want to know who urinated in the barrack.

Well, none of us said anything. We didn't know who it was. So I'll give it 10 minutes to make up your minds. Well, we couldn't know. We didn't know. We were going to-- if we did know, we weren't going to say who. But one of us had urinated in a corner of the barrack instead of going outside.

And he said, right, nobody? And he closed the doors, and you had these few assistants with a stick in their hands. And then we all had to knee bend, and go up and down, outstretched arms like this, hands, and move up and down, all the time, non-stop.

And if you stopped or you fell over to another, you had a smack with the stick on your head. And that went on for a hell of a long time. And nobody came forward to say who it was.

And the man who did it, he didn't come forward. But took a hell of a long time. If I may say, a half an hour, yes. And then he said, right, don't let it happen again. Out you go.

Then you queued up for your soup, and then you try to forget about it again. That type of thing they did with you.

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This heavy labor that you were doing, there must have been incidents in which people weren't able to carry on with the labor.

Well, if you fell out, then you marched into camp. And then you went out in the evening to the hospital to the doctor and tell them you weren't right. And if it was so, you went into hospital for a few days or whatever it was, or you didn't come back anymore.

I remember one incident, it was winter time, and I was very, very ill. And that was in morning. I felt very ill. And out on the work, I hid myself behind a door, a wooden door standing up somewhere brick, a lot of bricks.

I had stood all day. I stood there. I didn't work. I didn't work. I think I just came out to see what happened in the afternoon with the soup that's being doled out. But I was shivering all day long. And I got through that.

Nobody noticed?

No, the workers didn't say nothing. The kapo wasn't there. But I was very ill. I know that. I don't know whether it was flu or cold. Really miserable.

Well, I pulled through again every time it happened. If somebody was having trouble with his hundredweight load or whatever, would other prisoners help him, or were you all too weak that this was impossible?

No, you just carried what put on your shoulder. And if you happened to drop it, like I did once-- there was one occasion that in the afternoon, we had to empty part of a warehouse where a lot of hundredweight of cement was there. We had to get it on our shoulders, queue, queue up, walk away with it, and walk onto a narrow plank, a long narrow plank.

Too narrow. When you got in the middle of it, you sagged up and down, and then deposit it into the truck, and then you walked back again. And I carried 52 hundredweight that one afternoon from half past 2:00 till about a quarter past 5:00.

52. I counted them because I though to myself, I just want to see how strong I am. 52. But there were other occasions that I did the same thing, and I dropped a bag of cement. And it split open, and the kapo beat me up.

Because, well, I'm probably too weak. It fell off my shoulders. I couldn't do it. They beat me up. And this was before 12 or 12:30 in the afternoon. So before lunch, shall I say.

And during lunch, after lunch he says, come on, you Englishman. Sing. I didn't feel like singing. And imagine about 500 or 1,000 men around me, they all formed a ring. And I was in the middle. He said, go and sing. I had to sing a few songs. I didn't feel like it. I did it.

Do you remember what you sang?

Yeah, it's a silly serenade, a little bit of this and a little bit of that, one of my favorite songs. But I was more like crying because he beat me up, and then he wants me to sing.

So, he [INAUDIBLE] was a boss or something like that. He beat me up there, and now you want me to sing. What's the matter with you people? Well, I got through that again. But if the SS caught you doing the wrong things, not working, or, as I did many a time with my shovel, nobody's looking, it went into a bag of cement, poured open.

You mean you broke the bag on purpose?

Yeah, in my feeling, it was sabotage against. Some of us did it. And the next morning, you came to the place, and there was a heap of cement, broken bags and all that.

But accident, accident, accident. No, on purpose. Or putting bricks down. Four bricks. There was an idea, you put four

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bricks down, and the center ones broke in half. There was a whole heap of broken-- all those things we tried to do.

Yeah, that was work. We weren't strong enough to do, but we held out. Another thing come into my mind one afternoon, about 3 o'clock.

We got to unload a truck, a train, truck with bricks. So we're all queuing up, and we get our bricks. And we walk. And as I walk, almost next to me is a heap of bricks, and behind the bricks is three British prisoners of war having tea.

I can't talk to them because the kapo is there. But I looked, and on the sand is a little bit of yellow. God love us. That's egg, egg. God. Oh, I hope they don't tread on it.

I'm with my bricks still there, on and on, still there. Problem is I don't dare to jump over the bricks and pick it up. First of all, what would the Englishmen think of me, begging for food? So you remain a gentleman. As long as I don't step on it.

The kapo, I wish he'd go away. Anyhow, it happened. They finished their tea. They went away. It was still laying there. I looked around. The kapo wasn't there, wasn't looking, wherever he was.

I jumped over the bricks, picked it up, as big as the nail on my thumb. In a minimum of time, I had people around me, our prisoners, and I broke little pieces off. I think I could finish about five. People with a little piece of egg, but it wasn't egg. It was egg powder at that time, but I didn't know. That's how we lived.

So you didn't have an opportunity at that point to speak to the British prisoners of war. Did you ever?

No, no. Oh, yes. I speak. It was medicine to me when I saw a British prisoner. And right in the beginning when I saw British prisoner, when we went to Monowitz, an open fields, building, and in addition I saw all khaki. Look at that. Who are they? Das sind die Englander, the English prisoner of war.

OK. I made way to go. So my kapo said, where are you going? I says, I just want to talk to the people. Just stay here. Well, but later on, in between, I talked to several British prisoners of war. If they were working in a factory and machines and all that, I used to creep in and talk to them.

I said, I'm from London. Anything special to eat you don't want, don't throw it away. Or you got any cigarettes. I used to get cigarettes, three cigarettes. I got a good lot of soup, a bucket of soup in camp off the boys that were cleaning the containers. Sometimes they gave me a little piece of bread, or the soup wasn't too good for them, so I had them-- I had it now and then.

Even one occasion, the British prisoners of war, there was a lot of them sitting in a factory resting, lunchtime. And I happened to be there. I made happen to be there. And I talked to them.

So come on. You march out tonight with us. So I said, I can't do that. I says, look at my hair. Look at my face. A uniform won't fit me. I said, and if never catch me, they'll hang me. So that fell through. But they were-- occasionally they were-- meant to get me out.

And when we marched home to my camp, and they marched to their camp, often we met on the road, and I shouted out, good night, Charlie, good night, Joe. Oh, good night, Leon. If it were the same people. Yeah.

How did they react to you when they first saw you? They must have thought they were-- yes, they must not have thought there would be an Englishman in the German camp.

Well, I quickly told them who I am and why I was in there. And what could they answer? They were prisoners of war. See, prisoners.

Yes, but prisoners of war are treated differently.

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Different Oh, yes. They weren't beaten up. And they must have seen some of our boys being beaten up and the way we lived and all that the way.

I'm surprised they would have been where they could have seen that.

Yes. They were near us. Not all the time but often enough. But whenever it was, and there was a time I could get to him, I did. I always made an excuse to my foreman, , if the kapo wasn't there himself, the foreman.

And I used to say-- there was one occasion that I said to my foreman-- and he was a Jewish foreman. I said-- Abraham his name is. He's probably now in Israel somewhere.

Abraham, says, I've got to go to the lav. I said, the Englishmen are there. He said, don't forget, Leon, cigarettes. I said, OK. Then I went, and I walked to the British prisoner of war, and I stopped next to him, and I walk. I said, keep on walking, soldier.

And he looked. I said, I'm from London, and I'm here a prisoner, but I shouldn't be here, really. I was born in London, and they got my wife and kiddie here. And I talk. I said, and if anybody stops us, tell them or I'll tell them that I'm bringing you or showing you where the ambulance is, ambulance because you hurt your finger.

OK, I says, if possible, take it down on paper. I said, have you got pencil? Can you remember it? My name and where I lived?

So in my imagination, I was crying out for help. And then we stopped without knowing it, and all of a sudden, I heard somebody behind me say, what are you doing here?

So I looked around. There was a tall man, civilian. And he was a civilian SSer, one of the boss at the works. Where's your commander? I said over there. What are you doing here talking to an Englishman, English prisoner of war?

And they could shoot you for that. I said, well, the man is asking me for the ambulance. He's hurt his finger. He says, come on. Show me your command. Show me your kapo. I says to the prisoner-- I says, soldier, you might never see me again, but get that message through.

I never saw the soldier again. I think it was Sergeant Woolwich, somewhere from Woolwich. I could never find him, and he might never remember that.

Then I marched back to my-- he marched me back to my commander, and he says to the foreman. He says, I caught your man talking to a British prisoner of war. He said, you know what that means? He says, now, are you going to see to it or am I going to see to it?

So the man says, I'll see to it. So he hit me.

This was Abraham?

Abraham hit me. I fell down, got up, and he kicked me and hit me again. And I fell down again. And this other fellow watched him. Then he walked away. Then I got up, and he said, sorry, Leon, but I had to do it. I said, I know. That didn't hurt me. I knew it was only playing.

He said, where are the cigarettes? I said, I got no cigarettes. I had no time. But if he would have seen to it, the SS, in the evening I wouldn't have been alive now. They would have beaten you up. They would have made sport with you, made you crawl in the sand like nobody, and run up and run up, like I saw done with others.

So I escaped there again. But what hurt me most-- one afternoon, I was working, and I saw an Englishman, British prisoner of war, go into the lavatories. In the hut, I said to him my kapo-- I said, I've got to go to the lavatories. Hurry

up.

So I went, and I got in. I said, soldier, I said, he was just coming out. I said, soldier, I says, I'm from London. You haven't got any cigarettes on you? I'll get some food with that. He said, who are you?

I said so and so and so or so, and I told him who I was. So he said, you and I, we're prisoners here he says. But in England, the Jews, they run black markets, and that was a slap in my face. I said, look, I got two brothers in the army in England. I said, the same as you. And then he walked out. It was a slap in my face. It draws you back a bit, you know.

Yeah. Yes. There there's also an incident comes into my mind. We had-- I was working with a kommando with about 25 Hungarian Jews. There was one man there. He must have been probably about 30, 40, but he looked like about 50, 60.

But he took two hundredweights on his shoulders of cement that afternoon when we were working. And we said, don't do that because the kapo will make us all do that. And we are not fit for that. He wasn't going to listen.

So we got a hold of him and made him understand that one was sufficient. And then he understood. Otherwise, we would have-- yeah, sometimes you let the shovels come on top of one another. We're fighting one another, yeah.

Why would he have done that?

Well, he wanted to show his strength, I dare say, and show off or something. There was no need for that. No, if one carried eight bricks, we all had to carry eight bricks. Well, we can do with four.

Who decided what it was likely you could do? Who decided that you should carry eight bricks or four or whatever?

Nobody decided that. You just did it, unless the kapo had a bad mood and he said, I want you to do this doubled. So you get double.

But if you had just taken one brick, that wouldn't have--

No, no, not one brick. Not one brick. That would be too much.

How did you find that four was the right amount?

Well, that's what they gave you, four. The prisoner was handing out. You could carry for. Somebody was eight. Once we had to carry eight. It was twice as much as we usually do, four. And it was quick also to give you four. Eight would take a longer time to put it on your shoulders.

But unloading the coals, a truck of coals, that is dirty work. Of course, we got back to camp, how could you clean yourself? You had to wait till the weekend to take a hot bath, a hot shower without soap, without towels. But yet, you got to be clean in bed. So you wash yourself with cold water.

How did you unload the coal?

With a shovel. Shovel it in a little cart, and you wheel it away.

Before we go any further talking about Buna, Monowitz, I think there were some more points about Auschwitz.

Yes, Auschwitz, I stayed six months I lived in Auschwitz, the brick barracks where a lot of prominent people like solicitors and doctors and government people must have been living there all as prisoners. Because I remember that barrack I was sleeping in, and most of them were like that.

There were three departments, one ground, one middle, and one top. And the top floors, that's where we slept. And some of the incidents that come into my mind at Buchenwald--

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No, Auschwitz.

Auschwitz, that's right. Was that whereas in Birkenau we had lice and fleas, but more lice, in Auschwitz, it was the fleas that were getting the upper hand. Not there's dozens of them but many more.

I remember going with my kommando then to the work, and it was a very warm day, that I felt the itching on my legs. And I turned the trousers, the striped prisoner's trousers over, and there they were jumping about, dozens and dozens of them. And we just let them jump about.

That was one kind of pest, fleas. Also in bed. when we made time to get asleep, the fleas were there.

Was there anything you could do to get rid of them?

No, nothing. It was either kill them if you wanted to or do up with it.

Well, it's very difficult to kill a flea, isn't it?

Well, there was in the barrack, the lights went out, but there was always a blue kind of light shining, so you could see a little bit where you had to walk between the beds if you had to go downstairs. And I remember I could see the fleas dancing about on the blanket, and I used to catch them, big ones and small ones. I remember I used to catch them and kill them with my nails. And then I dropped off to sleep.

They buried themselves into the blankets. We each had one blanket each. That's all. But other incidents--

Did the kapos or guards worry about there being so many fleas?

No, no. I never heard them complain about a flea. About lice, yes, they were afraid of lice. Lice could make typhus. But fleas, they didn't worry about them. I never heard a kapo say about fleas or get rid of the fleas. No, we couldn't. There were too many fleas.

But all the same, we had to look after our bodies. We had to wash our heads, which were closely clipped. Our head so there was no dirt on our heads. We had to wash our bodies with cold water every morning. And in the evening, when we got in, there was no hot water.

Once, a week they probably called us out for a hot shower. And talking about that hot shower, usually on a Sunday, on a Sunday late morning. Then a kapo used to shout out, undress, we're going through the baths.

And we undressed, and we walked naked through the streets between the barracks into the showers, and there was a hot shower. And there we stood, no soap, no towels, just hot water. Let hot water get on to you, and then after several minutes, he used to say, right, outside. And you walked back as wet as you are, got into your barrack, and wiped yourself with your jacket, and that was it.

Well, that particular Sunday afternoon, we had the same thing. And we'd just come back from the baths. Say, two or three minutes later, a kapo shouted out, undress, to the baths. And we looked at one another. We've just had a bath.

Did you hear me? Undress, and get to the baths. Well, undressed again, and we went to the baths. We had another shower, and we came back. Those are the games they played with us, the kapos. They had fun in doing that, but we felt it.

Then there was the occasion in Auschwitz that I had to shave the people because I was formerly a hairdresser by trade, a barber by trade. And that was always on a Saturday, or if we didn't have to march out to work, we stayed in, and we got from the chief hairdresser of the barrack a razor.

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Say, two or three men got a razor, and say three or four men a shaving brush and soap. And so in a little part of the barrack, we put the man on the wooden bunks, and they were lathered, and we shifted them up like loaves of bread, shifted them up, and then they come under my razor, and I gave them once a quick over.

And hopefully, the razors were not too blunt. We hurried up the job. And for that we got a ration soup at the weekend, if there was sufficient for that work.

Did you ever nick anyone with the razor?

Oh, not the-- well, maybe the one or two, but you couldn't help that.

No, quite. Especially if the razor wasn't very sharp.

That's right. But I remember now you tell me that, there was a underkapo in the barrack , and he was a Polish non-Jew. And the word went round that I could shave, and I could shave well. And he called me into the bathroom, and he stood on a table, and he said, shave my head, and shave my bottom free of hair.

So I had to lather him as a lot of prisoners who, for instance, had to go into hospital from the barrack, they had to be shaved and cleaned underneath. And--

Why did the kapo wish to be shaven?

Well, they-- the kapos-- and I think it was a Polish character of having the head shaved and polished, absolutely polished bald and put cream on it, and polish it as if it was shining. And in the sun, it used to shine. But this particular man, I was lathering him after giving my attention to his lower part of the body, I couldn't say no. I had to do that.

Anyhow, I was getting used to doing that, like a doctor gets used to patients. And when I was done with that, I had to shave his head. And I was shaving him, and I nicked him, and it started bleeding. He didn't feel nothing yet.

I said, well, that's I'm going to get such a good hiding I won't be able to walk anymore. So I took the cream which he had, and after absolutely getting all the hair off him all around the head, I put a lot of cream on it.

And it was shining, and the bleeding stopped. And I didn't hear any more about it, but it must have left a crust or something in the skin, but I didn't hear any more about it. And for that he gave me a little jam, a glass, a little glass jar with jam he gave me.

They couldn't take this. They got those rations. They could go to the kitchen and get anything like. Of course, there were kapos and underkapos, and they were better seen to than we did. So that was that.

He never noticed?

No, he never said nothing anymore. Never said nothing.

Would there have been a homosexual element in his asking you to shave around the genitals?

Yes, I was thinking of that. I was thinking of that. But at that time, I didn't-- I didn't think that way at all. Probably just now I'm thinking about that, but because in the beginning in Auschwitz, I had to shave. And I was ill in hospital, but I could leave the beds and walk about. And I had to shave the people that were brought in, to shave them free from hair for operations.

And they had to also be cleaned underneath. So they queued up, so 10, 20, 30 men you did. So it was nothing to me. Probably he had element in it.

Yes.

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But I never questioned that. I never thought of that. The only thing was when I do the job right, I'll get hopefully some soup or something to eat, and he gave me a little jam.

No homosexual ideas in my head never came. I never seen anything like that until Monowitz-- until Monowitz which was near liberation. Then I became aware of what went on between kapos and some of the youngsters.

Well, I never-- I never looked at it that way. I never noticed it. I probably didn't want to notice anything like that.

I think in your memoirs, you mentioned that in Auschwitz hospital there was a young 15-year-old Polish boy who used to prance around and tease people.

Oh, yes. Oh, he was-- if I may say, he was a little bastard. And he was only about 12, 13 years maybe. A little fellow, but he had a lot to say walking, and he had a nice, clean, blue stripe uniform on. And he used to walk through the barracks and throw his weight about.

And he used to-- he called me once out, where's the friseur? And then he gave me some soup or something, probably for a job I had done. But we were all afraid of him because he probably was the darling of some of those kapos there, and what he said were done.

Do you mean that he was a homosexual darling of the kapos?

I-- no--

Is that what you mean?

I don't-- I don't know about that.

I wondered how he could behave that way.

Yeah. Yes. At that time, I always thought, well, probably he is a brother or a family of some of the kapos here. That allows him to shout about and to show his authority for nothing whatsoever. But we were afraid because if we were doing something wrong or talked back or something, he could easily go to the kapo and say, so and so and so and so and so and so, and then you were in for it.

No, there was a young boy. I guess he were about 15, 16. And this was in Monowitz, not in Auschwitz, that he had a kapo which he obliged. And I only heard at that time from hearsay, and I couldn't understand. He had a nice, clean uniform, and also he looked better than the others because he had gave him more food.

But I never questioned that until one day I heard a row going on in the room of the barrack of the kapos, the kapos' room in the barrack. And he came out crying, and I heard a kapo said out, out, away with you. And I never saw him again in the barrack.

He probably-- I don't know-- didn't do what he wanted or once or another. Only towards the very end of the war at Buchenwald, when the SS shouted through the loudspeakers-- every barrack had a loudspeaker.

It was connected with the headquarters of the SS. And they called out the morning, have the kapos see to it that every homosexual comes to the open space outside for roll call, the same as they did all the Jews had to get out, but also the homosexuals.

But then I was in bed. I was ill in Buchenwald. So they were getting them out for some reason or another. And I wonder how many are still alive of that lot.

though it's not difficult to see why young boys would oblige because of course it could save their lives.

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Save their lives, and they got more food. I got more food, but we couldn't say anything about that. I know that there was a kapo of the potato warehouse. The potato warehouse was a kind of a shed, a kind of a smaller barrack where food was stored-- cabbages, potatoes, barrels of beetroot-- where I used to work sometimes.

And there was one of the kapos. His name is Schiller, Schiller. Schiller we used to call him. He didn't hit us a lot, but we were afraid of him because if he did, he did hurt you. But he used to bully a lot.

And he had one of the young fellows-- I guess he was older than 16-- who used to work with us, and then stopped working with us. And we found that he was better dressed, and he was a more happy face he had. And he was shying away away from us when we got too near him.

And he was being used by Schiller. But I never noticed it until one night when we had to all get into bed. It must have been about half past 8:00, gone half past 8:00. The lights went out, and then you get to sleep. And then I was laying there, and I heard someone-- I heard Schiller's name because he used to sleep in the same barrack as us.

And I heard him say in German "not so but so. Yes, so is good." And the lights went on. Somebody probably wanted underkapos or wherever it was. Put the lights on. There he was standing straight up in bed on the top bed, and that fellow, the young fellow was standing opposite.

That's the only time I've thought, well, well. But only gave it a little thought because my mind was on getting out, getting out, staying alive. So I gave all those incidents only a little thought. I never stopped thinking about that.

But then I realized that there were homosexual actions taking place, although there was in Auschwitz or Monowitz-- I'm not sure, but there was a special barrack being built, put together, which contained women. We knew that.

And sometimes, after roll call, some of the kapos or underkapos were given tickets by the upper kapo. And they could go into the barrack and see the women. And I remember I was standing there watching it, watching after roll call. And one of the fellows said, wouldn't you like to go in there, Leon?

I said no. I hope it's not my wife that's in there. That's how I thought. Yes.

I think you mentioned at one point that whilst you were in Auschwitz hospital, you looked out a window or went outside and saw SS officers with pet rabbits.

Yes. This was the hospital barrack I was laying in. And all of us were very ill, suffering with various things, but mostly from the cold weather and so on. But we were being brought in and seen to.

Well, at that particular moment, I got out of my bunk, and I had to do nature's call into two containers, which were stood in front of a window in a kind of a wooden emplacement. Two round containers were placed there, small containers. And you did your duty in that until it was full, and then you had to carry it out into the main lavatory department and pour it out and bring it back again.

Many a time that I just laid over the side of my bunk, and I had to go, but I didn't want to. I don't think I could have lifted that container which was up to the rim. And I wait, I wait until somebody came along who was stronger than me probably, and then he took it.

And when it was brought back empty, I got out and did my duty. But at that particular morning, I looked through the window, and I was hungry. And I saw an SS officer cuddling a rabbit. They had a kind of a small place there with animals in it, rabbits.

And he was cuddling it. And I thought to myself, now look at that. He's cuddling a rabbit. At the same moment, he could kill me by hitting me instead of cuddling me. Yeah, the mentality was that. That's what it was.

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The rabbit was worth more to him than what was going on inside.

Were the rabbits there for food supply or as pets?

As pets, I should think. Because we never had-- I doubt-- well, we never had no meat. We never had any meat. And I don't think the way he was cuddling a nice white collared white rabbit. What I could see from where I stood, they would kill it and eat it. No, I think they were pets. I think so.

Were there any other animals about?

No, I didn't see no any other animals. No.

Did the guards have dogs?

I can't-- there must have been, but I can't say I noticed them. The guards I can picture now with guns and revolvers. They could put the guns in your back. They could hit you with the back of the revolver on your head. They could kick you.

But I didn't-- in fact, I don't remember that they ever chased a dog at me. There probably was one with the chief kapo of Monowitz camp who had a dog as a pet who walked with him, but otherwise I don't remember seeing a dog.

Did the officers ride horses?

I didn't see no officers on horses in the camps, no. No. No. It gives a different picture if you think of that in it.

Yes.

I don't. No, I never saw them.

I think one of the kapos at Auschwitz that you mentioned was a strongman or a bodybuilder who could bend iron.

Yes. There is in Auschwitz, and I hope it's still there-- I helped building it with hundreds of men-- the kitchen. Outside the kitchen, we built-- we built-- outside the barracks a kitchen.

Anyhow, there was a kapo who was a physically very strong, well-built man. And now and then, he used to give a performance on a Sunday afternoon in a spot in the camp. I think it was Monowitz or Auschwitz. I don't remember anymore. More likely must have been Auschwitz in the kitchen.

And we had wooden-- we had chairs or wooden bunks, and we could sit on there then. And in front of us on a little bit of a platform, a raised platform, this man used to perform like this. He had long, flat pieces of iron, and he invited three or four or six men out of the audience to come to his platform. And he took this bar and placed the middle of it on his head, and he told these three other men on both sides of six men to hang on it and to bend it.

And as they hung onto it and pushed it down, you saw it bending on his head. Then and if they didn't do it properly, of course, there was a lot of shouting going on. Anyhow, he got it and bent it, and then he took the rest in his hands and bent it as if it was a bit of elastic. Well, that went on several times, showing his strength and all that. But if you didn't do it correctly, they used to shout at you.

Anyhow, it was this man. I'm going now back to London after liberation. When I was liberated, a long time after that, I noticed in The Jewish Chronicle a picture and an article about Sampson II, and I looked at the picture, and I saw a familiar face. And I read the article, and yes, it was this man who had performed strong incidents in front of me.

So at that time, I had a nephew, and I said to him I'd like to meet this man. And he was-- because this article said that he was performing in London in the trades hall, I think, in Tottenham, to raise money for Israel.

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So off I went with my nephew. And I arrived there and looked around, and yes, there he was sitting, beautiful suit on, and a lot older, I should think, and a bit of hair now, not shaven.

And he sat there, on each side of him was a lady. And I went over to him. You see, my feelings was happy to meet somebody out of the camp who I had seen in front of my eyes. So I stood in front of him, and I said in German, you are the kapo from Auschwitz camp. You used to perform outside your strong act.

And within a matter of seconds, his hands went out to my lapels, and pulled me down. And he said, wasn't I good for the prisoners? I couldn't say no. Because there was one incident one evening when we got back from our work, and the prisoners who were caught during the work sabotaging, not working, or doing something what was not right, the SS used to take your number, and in the evenings after roll call, they called out your number, and you were punished.

You either were beaten. You either went over the wooden horse, and you got 20, 30, 40 smacks with a stick on your bum, which often went past your bum into the kidneys. Or they made you climb up on your elbows a heap of sand or crawl on your elbows and along the ground over and over again until you were out of breath.

Well, that particular evening, an SS officer handed this kapo a stick, and it happened right in front of my eyes. And he said, give this man a prisoner. Was maybe probably 20 or 30 beatings on his bum. And it did happen.

He was given the stick by an SS, and the SS told him to do that, and he did it. If he would have said, I'm not going to do it, he would not have-- I would not have seen him in London.

So in my eyes, in my thoughts, this man is not guilty of beating up one of our prisoners that time. But I do not know if he was bad for our prisoners during the work. But as a lot of kapos were usually well built fellows, ex-criminals from German prisons, prisoners let loose upon us, they could let their authority be felt.

So at that moment, when he said, wasn't I good for the prisoners, I doubt it. But I couldn't say you wasn't. I said, I dare say. He let go of my jacket, and he got up and walked away.

And the lady said to me, was he good for the prisoners? I said, I dare say he was. I can't say no. The rest of the evening, he performed the same act. He took off his suit, put on a kind of a suit, something what he performed in, and the s--

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