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Kind of tricot, like the wrestlers put on. And then he performed the same act as what he did in the camps, invited some men to hang on to his bar, until it bended. And it didn't go exactly as he wanted. And he lost his temper. But he had to control it. But my nephew next to me, said I know what you're feeling. I know what kind of man it is.

[INAUDIBLE] he's now in London. He's not in a camp, and he's still losing his temper. But he couldn't, of course, bully out and all this and that. And then when it was over, the dance took place. And I was standing there.

And he used to come to me more often than not, and stroke my cheeks, trying to be kind or something like that. Now, I know that this man was wrong, had been wrong at times in the camp. But I can't prove it. He is no more alive. No more alive. So there that incident.

If you spoke to him in German, I presume he wasn't English. What was his name?

He was Polish, Polish-Jewish, or German-Jewish. But I think he's Polish-Jewish. Yeah. But a very big, strong man, well powerful.

I understand that in the camps, the term organizing was used for obtaining food or whatever.

Yes.

Could you explain that, please?

Well, that was a word for organized, for pinching and trading. So if you could organize or pinch a spoon, which is valuable in the camp, a spoon, because you could eat your soup with it. You'd have to put bucket in your mouth. You'd put the spoon.

You paid, if you saw a spoon laying on a table somewhere, which I don't think ever happened, not in my case. You could pick that spoon and get food for it, soup or probably bread.

They called it organizing. If you could pinch somebody's other enamel bucket, and sell it to somebody who lost his bucket for a piece of bread or whatever it was, and the other thing is organizing anything you could do.

Well, I never, as far as I can think, I never organized anything. I didn't know how to go about it. My mind wasn't set that way. All I can say is organizing what comes into my mind now, I mentioned a potato seller, that potato warehouse, where I went in one Sunday and organized a cabbage, a raw cabbage which I set eating.

Yes, I did do that. And I also organized or pinched when I was working there, hands full of beetroot out of the beet root barrel, if nobody was watching. It was food, you see.

The main thing is food. So you stole things when necessary. And they called that organizing. Probably somebody organized somebody else. I remember when I come into the camp, the very, very first time when I had to undress all my good clothes went off.

My pullover, a beautiful pullover my wife had knitted went underneath of the jacket of one of the fellows that was taking our hair off. Well he organized it from me in that way. And he must have sold it or exchanged it for something else, for food.

But I never went that way. I never did this to my own mates. I never stole, only one, that little potato which I mentioned.

Yes, you had mentioned that.

How widely was this term organizing used?

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Oh, yes. Often. Often. But I never gave it a thought. I never gave it a thought.

Well it's an interesting word because of course it removes the bad connotation that there is in the word stealing. And so presumably people using that word organizing felt justified in doing what they did. Of course, as they were saving their lives.

Yes. Yes.

Were there any further anecdotes about Auschwitz that you had wanted to record?

Anecdotes?

Stories about Auschwitz that you had wanted to record?

Yes. There are so many. But I'll try to remember a few. For instance, the razor incident at Auschwitz. The razor in Auschwitz. I know the razor incident at Auschwitz. What was that? Yes.

We were given razors, as I said formerly, to shave the people, the prisoners. And I had a very blunt razor. And I made way into the little room where the kapos usually stay, went into the chief hairdresser who was a Belgian man, Belgium. But he was the chief hair dresser of the barrack who dealt out the razors. And he was standing shaving a man, and not a kapo I dare say in the chair.

And while he was shaving, I went up to him and I said, please could I have another razor, because I can't get on with the job. And as I said that, the man in the chair. Moved his arms.

He pushed the hairdresser out of the way, got up, and gave me a kick between the legs. And I fell out of the door and back into the barrack again. He was probably annoyed that I had interrupted this shaving business.

Then again comes into my mind, the kapo of the barrack said to me, now then, the hairdressers, the barbers, they stay here in this compartment. And you do your work. And no one is allowed in this compartment. And we took that from ourselves, now nobody can walk along, and we can get along with it.

I was doing my shaving. And in the doorway came the naked body, because it was summertime, a muscled body. I should think it was browned in the sun. But he was an under kapo, standing there with his hands in his side looking at us.

And near the door, I had planted my shaving strap. And I had to strap my razor. So I had to go over to the strap. And as I went to the strap, my elbow must have touched his body.

And he said, can't you see what you're doing you-- and he lifted up his arm as if he was going to hit me. And up came my arm with a razor. And I was no more in Auschwitz. I was annoyed that this man took this little what unnecessary item to fall on me. I said, if you dare to lift one thing on me, I'll get this into your body, in your face.

They could have killed me for that. But at that moment I wasn't in Auschwitz. I was just opposite a man who was doing something not justice to me. And his arm came down. He stood there, and he went inside. And I continued my shaving.

Probably half a minute after on myself, what are you doing Leon? You ought not have done that. Because if he would have gone to the kapo, man with a razor, they would have shot me. They would have killed me because it's a weapon. Well, luckily nothing happened.

Then there was the time that in this case the razors, you get your razors, but you got to give your razors up Sunday evening when you finish shaving. Well in the barrack, I had sometimes non-Jewish kapos, especially if it was a Pole, who received parcels of food from his family in Poland. And in those parcels was fat bread, sausages, garlic, everything to eat.

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And if I shaved those people in the week, if I could get a hold of a razor, then they used to give me a slice of bread, not often. The bread again, was all stale bread with green on top of it, moldy bread. But I ate it. I was hungry. Or they gave me one little piece of garlic, which I rubbed onto my bread in the morning, always thinking it's for my health, health, health.

It came the day, that Sunday, I was too late handing in my razor. We had to get into bed. So I put the razor in my pocket and I went to sleep. The next day we were on our work. And walking on our work between the barracks on the open space then, a kapo who I didn't know came to me.

And then later on I was told this kapo took boys and fellows out, if anybody walking into his little wooden compartment and told them to empty the pockets. And anything he saw in the pockets what he could use, he took, thinking it was cigarettes or whatever maybe.

Well he got a hold of me, dragged me inside. He said, empty your pockets. Well what could I do? I had to empty my pockets. So I emptied my pockets. And this razor came. Oh, he said. A razor. How do you get this? Oh, where's your kapo?

So he took me to the kapo. And this was, I think, a Russian, a boy about 20, 21. He was more than six feet tall and broad and strong, really a real strong man. He was the kapo of my-- we used to work with him, 1,000 men.

And he said, one of your man he's got a razor. And he looked and he says, a razor? And he gave me a good hiding. He kept on hitting me until I couldn't think, I couldn't walk, I couldn't do nothing no more.

Then he made me get up and stand aside. I was beaten up, because I had a razor in my pocket, which I ought to have given up the night before. But me thinking, I'll keep the razor. I might earn an extra something from the others in the barrack.

Well, it was wrong now. So when I got in, I had to give the razor up, or probably he did give it up. The next week when we marched out to work, what just happened on a Monday, on a Sunday I was sitting, Sunday I was shaving. On the Sunday he came to me, you keep a razor in your pocket. Tomorrow morning, in my little shed, you're going to shave me.

I looked at him. I said, but you beat me up for having a razor. He says, shut up and do what I'm telling you. So I had to do that. If I would have complained, it was no good. If I would have come out without a razor, he would have beaten me. So you just do what those bastards tell you to do.

So one week I was beaten up for having a razor. The next week I had to do the same for him. That was life. So it was fright, hunger, and beatings.

We got to Monowitz. When we came in from work one evening, yes, this was the 15th of September 1943.

Yes.

Is that right?

Yes. I don't know why I know this day, but it always stuck with me. Well, I was beginning to think the dates I could tell you later on.

Yes. Just before you go on, how did you know what day it was on an ordinary day?

Yeah, well we kept up. Some of us kept up with the dates.

But you didn't have a calendar?

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No calendar, no. We had no nothing. We had no pencils. I got a pencil later on in my concentration camp life and wrote a letter. But otherwise, there was nothing like that. No calendars or something like that. But some of the people, I dare say, the kapos, they had newspapers. And the dates, we tried to remember, one another.

Sometimes we didn't know. We just said, what is it? Well yesterday before this. And then you counted back. So this Sunday into Monday, and you try to remember that's how you have to do it. So we marched in from work. That 15 September, '43.

And after being a roll call, we stood there and we were told to undress. And in my vicinity, they took 200 men. We got dressed again, and loaded onto a truck, followed by a truck where SS with guns were placed. And we rode away and we arrived in Monowitz.

Did they tell you what they wanted you for?

No. No. That's the trouble, you see. Sometimes what they're going to do with us. But we thought, well, they looked at our bodies. So they picked us for our body. So we couldn't be too skinny to go into the gas chamber. So it must have been something else. So we guess we had to work. And yes, we went--

What had you previously heard of Monowitz?

Not much. There's supposed to be a rubber factory there, the Buna, they call the Buna, the rubber factory. I never saw the rubber factory. I didn't work in the factory. We worked, again, outside, mostly around the camp.

And this was a big, big, very big piece of ground, upon the dozens and dozens of factories were being built and warehouses all built with Jewish blood, you can say, and also non-Jewish blood. Because we had non-Jewish amongst us as well, like the Gypsies. They were all with us.

So 200 men then filled up the spaces in Monowitz. And I lived in various barracks. Monowitz, I spent 17 months there. And work was, again, heavy. The same life-- bullying, hunger.

How did the barracks compare with those you had known previously at Auschwitz and Birkenau?

Monowitz had wooden barracks, compared with the brick buildings. Of course, the brick buildings were strong and all that. But it didn't make no difference to us. Our bunks were the same wooden bunks, wooden bunks.

In threes again?

In threes again, and sometimes I slept, mostly I tried to sleep on the top. And one or two to a bunk, usually two to a bed. One with a feet that, and the other one with his head the other side. And that's how we got on, sleep, a blanket each. Broken mattress, no pillows. Probably some had pillows, but they were all broken, broken up pieces of straw inside. But I folded my jacket up and made the best of that.

And of course the barracks were crowded, especially getting up in a morning. And you have to climb down and stand in between a narrow space between the bunks dressing yourself. Some of them were quick, and they pushed you aside.

You fell over or something like that. Or you were screamed and cursed at, standing in the way. And I found that tying up my shoes was the longest bit there was. So I took pieces of wire and put them in the holes of my shoes, and just put them together and use them as shoelaces.

But not to have to do a lot with that pushing and cursing and all that. I used to get up earlier than the others, and put on my trousers carefully and my jacket under my arm. And then when the first gong went, I rushed out. And I was early in the barrack rooms where you could wash, where there was cold water.

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Were you able or expected to polish your shoes and keep your clothes clean?

Yes, well you're supposed to keep your clothes clean. But now and then you couldn't help it with the kind of work you did, and then you apply to the kapo. And then once a fortnight or once a week, there was a bundle of clothes being brought in.

And you were given or you picked it. Or even if your shoes were worn out or so, and there was a lot of shoes brought in. But you had to do it quick, or take what he threw to you, whether they were big or small.

You had no say. Oh, they'll fit me or this one will fit me. He wouldn't stand for that. They were so stupid I should think all the time. Then you try to change the shoes with somebody else or whatever it was. But anyhow, you had to make do with that kind of life.

Were these clothes and shoes new or used?

Oh, no. They were used. They were anything alive in there was killed in the steam houses. You had a wash house there where the laundry was done. And usually we had a lot of steam, I think. And you didn't care whether what. You just did it. You began to become miserable and also not caring in a little way.

If you had replacement clothes, were your torn or dirty clothes taken away or did you still have them? No, no. You gave them up. You gave them up. You just threw them down, and then walked away with the other. Yeah.

And in the winter time, well you had still your striped uniform. But if you're lucky enough, you were given a coat, either a striped coat, or a civilian coat. Of course that probably came from somebody who'd been killed in the gas chambers.

And I remember one day I was given a coat. And I wore it for two days. And then the third day the kapo announced just as we were going to march out, 98 to 88, you stay in. I had to stay in. I was what for?

He says, take off your coat and take it to the tailor. Now one of our mates was acquainted with tailoring. And he had to cut the back of the coat out, say, a foot by a foot square, and sew a white patch on there.

And I thought, what a pity. It's a beautiful coat. But they did it because where you worked, the guard could see you walk about. He could aim at you, it was. And you couldn't go into the village to escape. They all thought of this, escape.

You had a patch on your clothes and that was you were a prisoner or a criminal. Yeah. But there was also times that there was no coat, and I just marched out in the wintertime with my jacket and trousers, terrible cold and all that.

And I applied once into one of the smaller barracks where you could obtain gloves. So they said, well those with cold hands can apply for gloves. And then I went for gloves, and queued up there early in the morning. And then I was let in.

What gloves? There are no gloves. And they kicked me outside. All those things to demoralize you, till you didn't trouble no more. To me, it wasn't worth doing things to end up with a good hiding. I had several. And I knew what could happen.

The main thing of mine, stay alive, get out, and tell. And if you couldn't do that, you went under. You must have gone under. That's why a lot of them just gave up hope. They didn't see it anymore.

At the Buna works, you were mainly doing heavy physical labor outdoors. And of course, it was extremely cold there in Poland in the winter.

In the winter time.

If you didn't have gloves, could you do something else, to wrap up your hands for protection?

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No. I couldn't. And if we had to unload trucks with bricks, the tops of your fingers, the skin start aching. But you made the best of it. You made the best of it.

Did other people have gloves?

No I didn't notice. If they did, they must have organized it. They must have given something up for it, like I, when I was very ill, I had pneumonia. And I gave up for the first time, I gave up my ration of bread for a small cup or bucket, a small cup of water, which was not allowed. Yes, I remember that. Because bread was gold. And there wasn't a lot of it.

Did you have socks?

No. No. No socks. Your feet went into your shoes and that's it. No.

The SS or other people who were guarding you were also out of doors I expect in this cold weather. How were they dressed?

They had gloves, and they had thick heavy coats on it. Oh yes, and proper hats, they were all right and they had their shoes or Wellingtons. Oh yes, they were well against it. They could do it. But not us. We weren't there to live. We were there to die whichever way.

Did you have hats?

We had berets, berets.

The same as the ones you had previously described that you had to do a salute with?

Yes. But in the beginning, as far back as Birkenau when we were drilled to take off our berets, we had caps, civilian caps from people who had been killed. Later on, we got a beret. Someone had striped white and blue striped berets. And some were just black berets. And I had a black beret.

Did you have any sort of insignia or mark on you or your clothes to show that you were a slave worker at Monowitz, rather than an Auschwitz prisoner?

No. That's all the same. You had your number and your triangle. And the Jews had two triangles, as if it were the Star of David, and the number that went on the side of your trousers and in the front of your jacket. You had to sew it on there. That's the only thing. And your arm of course, on your arms, the tattoo number.

And that was the same for Auschwitz or Monowitz. Only in Buchenwald, I got a different number.

Yes. The purpose, the sole purpose for your being at Monowitz was for working?

Yes.

To what extent did that make any sort of different atmosphere at the camp than at Auschwitz or anywhere else?

No difference. It was hard work, unloading trucks of bricks, cement, 100 ways of cement, coal, cables, pipes, iron pipes. Digging the ground to lay the cables in. And that went on and on and on, pushing the trains. The trains didn't come right into the camp.

Somehow not into the camp, but into where we are to produce our labor. They were staying there a little way from us, say a quarter of a mile or something. And no locomotive. So we had to push the trains right up to where we wanted, and then unload.

And that pushing went both sides of the layer of trucks we stood in, and we're pushing with our shoulders. And the

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kapos would have a whistle, and they would say, whistle. And every whistle you have to push, or they used to shout up, shout up, push. Or they used to come along and like whipping the cattle, pigs or something. They used to move us on to push. And if you wasn't pushing right, they came along and gave you a couple of kicks.

And I remember one which we called the black kapo, he wasn't a black man. He was a German. He was a criminal, a tall fellow. He gave me a kick once in my side. And I was doing it right. I was doing my duty. But he just picked on me. That's how it went.

This same man made me, because I was a Jew, unload all by myself a truck load of hundreds of pipes which were meant to go into the ground, into the ground of the building sites. So much so that even the Gypsies that I was then part of a Gypsy kommando.

The Gypsies said to me, Leon, Leon, how could you do it? No one was allowed to help me. And he stood watching me, non-stop at it until it was empty. I'll never forget that. What evidence was there at Monowitz that you were working for IG Farben?

I didn't know. I didn't know. They always were talking about Buna rubber factories, but I never saw a rubber factory. I didn't. I only just worked building, the sites unloading trucks, carrying those big iron-- what you call them? For gas, big iron, which they use not oxygen. Is it oxygen? Not oxygen.

Cylinders?

Cylinders. I remember me and one, the two of us had to carry them on our shoulders up the steps into the building sites and put them where they were wanted. And we always thought if we drop one of them we might go up and blow up. But we had to do those things, unless you could get out of it.

See the kapos says, you, you, or you and you. And then you four went-- and you went somewhere, you hid yourself behind somebody else. Yes.

Someone told me that at Monowitz, dead prisoners, dead workers were thrown into the ditches that were dug for cable laying, and then cemented over.

Oh, no. I never heard that. I believe it. But I never heard it. I never seen it.

Were there people with you there at Monowitz whom you had known previously in Auschwitz?

In Auschwitz? Well, of the 50 men, Leon Borstrock soon went away from me.

So were you with people you knew or not at Monowitz?

At Monowitz, only no. No, I didn't see Leon Borstrock no more. He worked in a different department. When I saw him later in London, he told me at a better job than I did. He didn't like to talk about it. He used to see how we had to work on the trucks, and all that. But he had an indoor job.

He could draw signs but I think he was on the administration department. And he had a better job than I had. And he didn't want to talk about it. He didn't have to be ashamed of that. If you were dealt into a better job, that's OK. It's a matter of luck.

So I was alone with all types of nationalities, Jews and non-Jews, Poles, Czechs, Belgians, French, some Dutch, but which I didn't know. At Auschwitz, if I can come back, I mean Auschwitz was friends of mine, yes. There was Leen Sanders. He was a champion boxer of Europe. But I think I've talked about that before.

Was he the one who sent you some potatoes?

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Yes, right. Yes. Had I mentioned that before?

At Monowitz, where there were these many different nationalities or groups, as you mentioned, how did you communicate with each other?

Well, most of us understood a little bit of German. And what we did we have to communicate to one another?

With just normal speech. I mean you yourself didn't actually know German very well, did you?

A little, not much. But we didn't have to communicate a lot. You got on with the job. And if they were talking, you didn't want to join in to talk. You just didn't join in. There was very little to talk really, unless you knew somebody, and then you were converting things which you both knew about. In Monowitz, I don't think I didn't talk a lot of things. There was nothing to talk about.

Was this at Monowitz that you came across your friend De Wolf, a Dutch friend?

Yes, Jack De Wolf. He passed away a couple of years ago. But he come out. He came out of the camps. But he had a weak heart. Now, I knew him from before the war. And I met him again in Monowitz.

He was very optimistic. And I used to visit him in the barrack where he was living. And we used to meet during the day sometimes. And I remember that there were other Dutch then with him, who probably had left Holland with him after me.

And I remember when I used to go singing for some extra food, I used to sing in the barracks and I got enough soup left over for the next morning. I used to save that, if they didn't pinch that through the night, and shared it with Jack De Wolf and some other Dutchmen, usually about four of us.

And I remember now that this was in Buchenwald. Now I want to go back to Monowitz. There was a bombing was taking place. I was in the camp. I didn't go out to work. But the place where some of the prisoners had been working had been bombed. And they were bringing victims in.

And one of the victims was Jack. He had a very thick blue eye. And he was in a barrack. And I remember getting a bowl of soup, giving it to another Dutchman through the gates. Because we were not allowed to get in there. Somehow I got to him. I said, give that to Jack or share between yous. And I used to do those things when I could.

Since Jack De Wolf left Holland after you did, did he have any news for you? I mean people you had known or what was going on.

No. He left Holland after me. But when I met him in the camps, he didn't have no news on one thing or another. He was picked up I think for doing some black market deals or something like that. And he had already lost a son, his oldest son, who I knew as a child. He was before him in the camps. And he died. He didn't come out.

But he couldn't tell me nothing about the family. No. But he did have photographs with him of his family. That was nice. I said, well, you got something to live for anyhow.

How was he able to keep the photographs?

Yeah, that's what I thought as well. He said, it was a matter of luck. Probably by taking out of his pockets or so, that he held onto them. Later, probably, must have lost them. Because we had nothing no more by the time we evacuated on the long march back to Buchenwald. None of us had anything I don't think. That was in Auschwitz.

Halfway through my prison in Auschwitz, one of my mates said, Leon, come outside. There's a gentleman. He wants to see you. When I came out he introduced himself as Mr. Jacobs or Jacobson, who had worked in Westerbork on the administration department.

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And he said you're a very, very unlucky man. Because when your train had left with your wife and kiddie and the others in it, it was gone about a quarter of an hour, your name was paged in the camp. But you had gone already. Your papers had arrived for internment. Well, what could I do? What could I do?

My train of thought was then, well, I was right. My papers were on the way. But this man, Schlesinger, had to come on the inside of Westerbork. He didn't do his duty. In any case, he didn't do his duty.

He could have exchanged us for German prisoners because the Germans had a law that so many nationalities could be exchanged for German prisoners of war. But he never did this.

And matter of fact, I got papers, which mentioned that my case had been into, and my papers must have been on the way. And that was this Dutchman. Of course, he didn't come back. A lot of them didn't come back.

I think at Monowitz, you had mentioned there were women workers, Polish women. Were these prisoners or were they local women just doing a job?

Well, I think they were prisoners. They were women. And I was surprised to see them carry bricks, not four, but a lot more than we used to do. And they used to dig in the ground. Then I remember I was working on the ground and not far from me was a Polish non-Jewish woman. I couldn't talk Polish.

She took a fancy to me, and she told her name, Rosa her name was, if I remember, Rosa. And I gave her my name. And we all used to suffer. In any case you suffer from a wet dripping nose.

And I used to wipe my nose on the sleeves. To them I was saying that. And then she gave me, the following day just by chance, she had to be there again working. And she brought me a handkerchief. And I found it so marvelous.

Of course I haven't got a handkerchief anymore, and I didn't see her any more after that. But those things still remain in your mind. If only I could see her again, and if she would remember that, but I doubt it. I doubt it.

You said the women were quite strong. Does this mean that they were healthier somehow?

Yes, they must have been healthier. She looked healthy. Probably she was just a very short as a prisoner. But they were building a factory with pipes that had to be cemented and all that. And they went up the steps, the step ladders, like flies. They could do it. And I was surprised. Because I only up to then thought that men only did that work. But the women did work hard.

What sort of number of women were they?

Oh, I didn't see many, one or two only, one or two.

You had mentioned singing in the barracks at Monowitz for extra soup.

Yes.

What did you sing? Well let's say, "Ave Maria" or when you do "The Lambeth Walk."

In English?

Or "Underneath the Arches," a little bit of that. A few, four or five or six songs, as best as I could. But there was one occasion I sang in a barrack. I think it was barrack 14. And the kapo was a pro-British man, a German. And he heard me sing, and he gave me a portion of soup. And he says, sing "God Save the King."

I said, I dare not. Because the SS guard is outside almost, he could hear. And it's quiet in the evening. You should sing

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it. I thought to myself, well, it might bring me in a piece of bread or some soup. So up goes Leon on a chair. And I start singing (SINGING) God save our gracious King.

And they applaud it. Because the prisoners were listening as well, and the kapos, and the other kapos. What blooming cheek I've got to do that. If this SS would have heard, he would have said, what's this going on?

The same answer now then. You come here every evening for a portion of soup. Because singers must be fed. They must be strong. I said at Christmas time, you come here and sing to us, Christmas.

I went every evening I went there. I got my portion of soup. Apart from that, I still went singing around. That wasn't sufficient for me. Four or five barracks at least I had to do, if I could. Then comes the Christmas time. The night before Christmas, I think it was.

Will this be Christmas 1943?

Yeah. Yes. And a little bombing takes place and all the lights go out. And everybody into the barracks. And Christmas, no one was allowed out of barracks. So I had all the time I had the soup for nothing. The concert never took place.

And while I'm telling you that, I remember one evening I came away from a barrack with a bucket of soup, which I was going to save for the next morning. And the sirens went. And the chief kapo of the camp, he was walking about. And I ran into him without knowing. It was dark. And he gave me a kick. He said go into your barracks. And he nearly kicked the soup out of my hands. I remember that.

I must have had angels around me and good spirits to escape a lot of incidents.

When you sang "God Save the King," do you think the other prisoners knew what you were singing?

Yeah. Well I dare say some of them had the melody or something. But the kapo knew all right. I never questioned it. I never questioned it. Of course, then I thought myself, well, they're all looking at me. And sometimes I stood there eating my soup, what they gave me. And I almost said, well yeah boys, I'm sorry. But I feel hungry, same as you are. I worked for it. I sang for it.

And that's how I conquered my weaknesses.

Were people jealous of your singing ability?

No. I don't think so. Of course, I wasn't-- there was no piano I just wasn't really singing what I did.

No, but other people?

Oh, they could do it probably if they wanted to do. They could have done the same, and probably they did. There must have been several that did this. I know that the first Dutchman had told me way back in Birkenau, he went singing around the barracks. I didn't do it then. But it came into my mind.

As my civilian life fell away from me, and the hunger appeared, and I didn't know what to do, then I tried it out. Even in Buchenwald, I sang for the Americans. I got up a concert for them, for the boys.

Found some man who could play a fiddle, some with the saxophone, instruments which the SS had left behind, confiscated from people that had been killed off, and myself. And I used to sing, can't do the fiddle, and all that. And we got our rations, American army rations for that. Yes.

Did the SS officers realize you were singing? Presumably they didn't actually notice when you sang "God Save the King." But I mean on other occasions?

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No, no. They didn't do much. I imagine that eating time, say half past 5:00, 6:00, the SS probably wasn't aware of what, and they were in their own barracks. Probably one or two were walking past in the camp. But they didn't take a lot of notice. In that case, we could just stand there and sing inside.

I never used fortissimo singing, probably couldn't at that time. I never was-- I was applauded by the prisoners, but I was never mentioned about my voice, no.

I think you mentioned there was a band or orchestra at Monowitz that played when you were marched on parade perhaps.

Yeah, there was one in Birkenau which I never saw, was too far away, in which a friend of mine was a trumpeter and a fiddler. I never knew that then. He's now somewhere in Canada. He used to live in the same street as me. I used to play with him as boys. But in Auschwitz, we had an orchestra that played when we marched out to work every morning.

In Auschwitz?

Auschwitz, also in Monowitz. And when we marched back from work again, and when some of us were being hung then the orchestra also played, until the moment came that they were hanged. Yes, there was an orchestra.

What can you tell me about the composition of it?

Well, I'll listen to some of the marches that play or pieces of music, but in my mind, it never took long, a quarter of an hour, 20 minutes. The thing was playing while you were waiting to be counted for. You often, well I thought, hell is here and they're making music. Why? Why? That's how it was.

Who were the instrumentalists?

All prisoners. Prisoners brought in, professional musicians. If you were good, you were picked. If you weren't good you just became one of us or went to the gas chamber. This particular friend of mine who lives now in Canada, he arrived at a time when a kapo said, who of you people are musicians? I'm looking for a trumpeter. Who can play the trumpet? And three men put their hands up, as I was told.

And he let the first one play. He said, that side. The second one, was not to his liking. My friend played. He was a good professional. He had his own band and all that.

He said, you're in. And the other two, probably they went into ordinary works, as we did and whatever. But it saved his life. And later on, it saved the life of his brother by him being in the orchestra. He could make mates friendly with the doctors.

His brother became ill and had to be sent to the gas chambers. One thing or another led to the other, and they saved his brother. They smuggled him out. And he came back to Holland, his brother. He also had lost everything. Married again, lost his wife again. And he died a couple of years ago. I knew those people. Because I used to grow up with them.

Did the musicians live separately from the rest of the prisoners?

Well, in my barrack, I never noticed that there was a musician living with us. Probably they had their own barrack, not as big, probably a barrack where they could rehearse or whatever it was. Of course, there is a lady here, Lily MathÃ©. She was in Auschwitz. And she played for Eichmann, I think. She was also a member of the orchestra. I met Lily some years ago.

What music did they play?

I never thought about the titles of the thing, sometimes a popular song, sometimes pieces of overture or whatever. I never took a lot of notice of it. It never made me happy, those things, that I had to stand there and sing with it in my

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mind, hum with it. No.

There was no time for me to do that. No. Life was too miserable. For most of us, we just didn't-- we knew we were going to march out. We heard music. OK, well, we're going to work again. What's going to happen today? We'll I ever get back?

We marched in overnight, this things is playing again. And you stand there. I'm hungry. Let's go. Hurry up. I want to get inside and have a bit of food. And that's how we thought.

So your mind wasn't with the orchestra like you would be doing here in civilian life. Stand and listen there. You knew it was playing in the background. But you wasn't all ears for it. You was looking in front of you. You're going to be counted in a minute and what's going to be next?

You said they played popular music, as well as classical. Would it include things like "Deutschland Ã¼ber Alles" or the "Horst-Wessel-Lied?"

No, I don't remember that. No, I don't think so. What the SS did make us do and the kapos, when we were marching to work or marching back, sing. We had to march and sing. And what was it again? "Und wir fahren nach England," and we are going to sail to England at that time. We are to sing that while we were-- and then we also used to sing "Roll Our the Barrel." (SINGING) Roll out the barrel.

We used to walk.

In English?

No, in Dutch or what German what it was. But I used to sing a little bit in English. And what did I used to say? Well I don't think I did a lot of singing while I was walking like that.

And then there's one or two other songs which I don't remember anymore, because we didn't know, and when you're marching there in groups of 500 or 1,000, some of them be singing. If you didn't sing what?

You didn't look at everyone whether they were singing or what? No. We just do it. If you would, of course, you're not singing or walking, probably they would say, come on. But no things like that, not what I experienced.

What sort of music did they play for the hangings?

Just music. Just music. I don't remember if it was sad music, just the sound of music.

I think it was that winter of 1943 to '44, in which you became ill at Monowitz, was it?

I became ill. Oh, well, I was several times ill. I had if you mean that one, that occasion when I had been trying to sing in one of the barracks.

The kapo kicked me out. And kicked me between the legs. And that developed into a big lump in that region. And I couldn't walk anymore, because it's interfering with my steps. So I was allowed to get into the hospital.

When I got into hospital, I developed a temperature and they operated upon me. Is that what you mean? So the doctor and one of the Polish nurses, male nurses, nice fellow he was. He could talk English.

They took me out of my bunk and operated upon me. I did have anesthetic then. And when I came to the doctor, he said, that's a very interesting story you've been telling us. And I don't know what story it was.

And then they took me back to my bunk. And I laid in my bunk. And in my bunk I shared with an Italian solicitor. And I didn't eat my potatoes. And the rations of food I got, soup was always thin and hardly a potato in it.

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My portion of bread was small always, never a large piece. And that when I was in my bunk, the soup was given to us. And I had a bucket full. And there was four or five potatoes in it. And the soup was thick.

I couldn't eat it. I laid it beside me. And the Italian said to me, let me have it. It will get bad. So I gave it to him. I couldn't eat it. As if fate was playing with me, you know? Well, a couple of days later, the barrack had to be fumigated because it was overrun with bugs.

And we could not sleep during the night in the dark. They seemed to come to your body and itch you, bite you. That morning, early morning for our breakfast, for our piece of bread or whatever it was, we got a mug full with some sweet-- it wasn't coffee. It wasn't tea. But something sweetish syrupy stuff, and we all drank that.

And there was a table beneath my bunk where I slept. And on there was about a dozen. And in every mug I saw a little bit of the sweet stuff. So I said to one of the prisoners. Put it all together in one and give it to me.

Probably I was a bit very ill or something. And he took pity on me. And he poured it all into one mug. And I drank it. It was wet. It was something I needed. I was thirsty. I was very ill. I realized that. But my brains were still working.

And then one by one, we all were carried out. And the barrack had to be fumigated. And they were already patching up near the windows with paper and all that. And then came my turn to be carried out.

And this Polish male nurse, he took me on his shoulder and carried me along the road, between the barracks to another barrack. And we got into a little part of the barrack. And he put me on a chair and I fell off of the chair. And I can still hear him say the England is kaput. Which meant the Englishman is dead.

And I thought myself, no, I'm not dead. I'm not going to die. Then he picked me up from the floor. And put me on the chair. And from nowhere came dysentery. I couldn't stop it.

He picked me up again. And carried me to a barrack where only prisoners were living with that complaint, dysentery. And I always wanted to get into that barrack, because I had worked with prisoners who had been in the barrack with the same complaint. And they found that the kapo in there was a very good man. And I thought to myself, now--

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