

Mr. Zwirek reel three.

It was tragic to see people that you have known all your life, or went to school with, or their parents just dying of hunger. And they could not survive. And one had to adapt themselves and live their own life. You try to help people as much as you could. But there wasn't enough to help the others.

What date are we talking about were these last three months of the ghetto? Do you know?

Yes. The last three months of the ghetto was in the beginning of 1941. The ghetto was closed in March 1941.

Can you tell me how the ghetto was closed down, what memories you have personally of that?

Yes. Very vivid memories, very good memories. We had an idea that something is happening. How people got to know it's hard to say. But some people knew, and my father also knew that-- thought the ghetto is going to be disposed of. One night, it was in the middle of the night about 2 o'clock. We heard hammering on the doors. And they were shouting, the Germans, everybody out! Everybody out! Juden raus! Juden raus!

And we dressed ourselves quick. Half of us were sleeping, half dressed. And my father carried his father. It was my grandfather on his back. We carried out. We all had to assemble in the middle of the ghetto. It was like a square and a little [NON-ENGLISH]. And they shouted, just take in your hand whatever you could, that's all. And we took a little case, whatever.

It was ready. That reminds me. My mother had always this little case ready in case of emergency, like you see a woman going in to have a baby. She has this little case ready. And we all gathered there. And we waited there for a few hours. We had to stand. It was the middle of the night till early in the morning, about 9 o'clock. And then they brought in lorries, the Germans. And they made us get on the lorries. And it was tragic.

They rushed us on the lorry, and beating us over the head, really beating us with chairs, with woods, with whips, to pack in as many as they could on each lorry. And people were bleeding from all over the places. And the families were trying to keep all together naturally. And we managed to get on the lorries. And they drove us out to a little town called Dzialdowo.

How do you spell it?

D-Z-I-A-L-D-O-W-O.

Right.

We were there for about two weeks in this place, living in barns and stables just living there.

And was this a transit camp?

Just that was just like a transit camp. They kept us there for two weeks. And then after the two weeks, they sent us into I don't know how far it is, maybe about 150 miles away, to a part of Poland where it was Polish, the Polish protectorate that I mentioned in the beginning, to a little town called Suchedniow.

S-U-C-H-E-D-N-I-O-W?

Yeah. Just sent us there, and we were there altogether about five months. My grandfather was with us. But we managed to get him into an old age home there. And we lived in that Suchedniow for five months. And after that, they sent us out from there, not all of us, just a few of us, to a little village called-- it's very hard to pronounce-- Laczna, L-A-C-Z-N-A, Laczna.

Were you living in houses in these three places?

In houses, yes. What they did, the Jewish community leaders had orders that they're getting in so many thousands of Jews from, let's say Plock. And they had to put them to live with other Jewish people who lived already in their own flats. Let's say they had two rooms. They said, all right. One room will be for another family. So they all had to take in a family or two.

So we all lived there for a while.

Was this the same at Suchedniow?

Yes. Suchedniow and Laczna were both the same. Why they sent us to Laczna? Only a few of us. There were big farms, and they needed people to work there. So they sent us there. And I stayed there for about I think about six, seven months. And then at the end, they sent us back to Suchedniow, and we didn't know why. But afterwards, it appeared to us they were making in Suchedniow also a ghetto.

And whenever they wanted all the Jews together, they made a ghetto. So it was easier for them when they wanted to get the Jews to repatriate, to send away wherever it was.

Is Suchedniow a village or a town?

It's a town, a small town. Let's say, like Luton, a small town. A bit smaller than Plock it was, but it had a big Jewish community. So they sent it there. And it is nearer maybe Warsaw. It was a main thing is it wasn't the Polish protectorate, you see? They didn't want any Jews in the part of Poland were they considered part of the Third Reich. And Plock, where we lived before, is not far from Prussia, not far from Danzig. And they didn't want any Jews there.

Anyway, so when that sent us back to Suchedniow, so it was the same thing. They made a ghetto. So it was the same thing, running short of food. So my father said to me, we'll have to get out one night, and get some food. Because as he was a tinsmith, he still had his tools with him, a few tools. He said I'll go down to the farms, I'll tell them that I repair some pens or pots or whatever, and we get some food from them.

One night we did go. We smuggled ourselves out. We went to get some food. All during the day, my father was knocking in various farms, small farms. Poland has loads and loads of small farms, small, a few acres every farmer had. And he offered to do some work for them, which they gladly needed somebody to do it. And he used to pick up potatoes, and butter, and egg, and cheese, or various things and we loaded it all up. We had the rucksacks. We carried it all. We carried it with parcels. And we waited all night on the outskirts of Suchedniow.

We were sleeping I remember like in a park. And early morning about 5 o'clock, we smuggled ourselves in, back into the-- because we dare not walk nighttime. There was a curfew. And if they saw somebody walking, the Germans they could shoot just indiscriminately. But early in the morning, 5:00 or 6:00, the curfew was lifted. And then we came back with the food.

But unfortunately, this also didn't last long. And this is a coincidence too, but the Germans knew all about it. One night, it was in Suchedniow they surrounded the ghetto. And that was a night I don't know from the Jewish history, Yom Kippur night, the Day of Atonement. In the evening, we all went to the synagogue or wherever to pray. And they surrounded the ghetto.

We got up in the morning, and my father always used to get up, shouted, the ghetto surrounded. And we all had to get out. So the Germans started shouting, we should all go to the marching. They were going to march us to the railway station. And people started running away. I ran away. My father ran away. Some old friends ran away. And we were running away. And there was a river near us. We ran away, it was called the River Kamienna, River Kamienna that was where we were near Suchedniow.

We rushed in the river. The Germans started shooting. But naturally, they couldn't shoot everybody. I ran right across

the river, right across. And I came to a cemetery, a Polish cemetery, a Catholic cemetery. And I remember there was big wires on top, just ordinary spiking wires. I climbed through and I cut myself. I still got the scar to this day, right up to here.

On your thigh.

On my thigh a cut, and then I turned around. There was my father. There was another about a dozen people, running away. And we stopped there, the Catholic cemetery a few hours. And I tried to damp this with some rags to keep the blood, shouldn't flow too much. And during the day, we ventured out we went towards. A town Skarzysko, a very big town. It is a big town mainly, like a point of railway. It's spelled like this. Skarzysko.

S-K-A-R-S-Y-S-K-O.

Yeah. This Skarzysko is a town you take in Britain like York, it's most of the railway has to go through there. It's a very big--

Junction.

Very big junction. Anyway, I got in there. And I got in there. And I managed to get some work on the railway. It was under the German supervision. And because near that town, there are a lot of Jews still living there. And I managed to work there. And I worked on the lines, repairing lines, all railway work.

And after a day working there, I was working at the same day, the very following day the train with all the Jewish people from Suchedniow, and my mother was on it, stopped in this line all night, because the lines were engaged. So they're being taken to Treblinka to a liquidation camp.

And I was standing at the railway. And my friends were on the train with my mother. They called me. And I dared not look up. I couldn't look up, because it's SS. The Germans looked there. We were not to look up even. It was the train was sided on the side, and we were nearby working on the lines. And all my friends were there. We didn't realize that they were going to be perished over there. We thought they were going to be sent away somewhere to do some work.

But a bit later on, we found out what happened. And that's the last time that I saw my mother, the day before. And all my friends and my neighbors, they were all in the same train with them.

And now I was there. And then after a while, there came in order, all Jews must leave their jobs and gather there in the site, and they're going to be marched out of this place.

Naturally, we didn't know what's happening again. And the Germans came in and the Polish overseers, and said those Jews who are employed by the railway must leave. And we left. We gathered and then they marched us away from that little thing to a small place called Szydlowiec. It's not so important, a tiny little place. They marched us. It took us all day. S-Z-Y-D-L-O-W-I-E-C, Szydlowiec.

We were there for about a week. And after a week, they just said next day we are going to be evacuated. We didn't know where. But we were beginning somehow to get suspicious. But luckily, that same day the Germans came near the camp. That was like a camp, where they called it a camp. It was more like a football pitch, and it was all surrounded by Germans. And we were there. There was nowhere to sleep. We were sleeping just on the grass.

And they said they needed a few workers for various trades in the camp. And I was still at that time with my father. And my father said, yes, he's a tinsmith and he's a roof cover and all that. And that took electrician, a carpenter, and a brushmaker, and a tinsmith. And I was going with my father. And I nearly didn't manage it. They didn't want to take me. They I said I looked too young.

And my father pleaded with them, that I'm a good worker and that I understand the trade. Anyway, so they let me go. 12 of us went. And we were taken out of this little place and taken to first concentration camp, also in Skarzysko, but

different part of Skarzysko town. There was a big camp. We were taken there. And I spent there some time. I worked various kind of work. I worked in a factory from producing bullets for various guns.

I went back to do some railway work. I went to a factory where we were producing flours from potatoes, very hard work it was. But that Skarzysko had three different camps. One was work A. One was work B. One was work C. I was in work B.

At the end, the work B wasn't bad for me. For about 15 months I worked by the potatoes. So naturally, I stole potatoes, as much as I could. And about three times I was nearly executed because of that as well. We had to help ourselves with food, otherwise we couldn't survive. And I worked night time in this mill of potatoes.

So I knew already what time and who is coming on guard you every hour. Anyway, I used to pile myself up with potatoes, full here, and in my trousers. I had string in my trousers.

Put them in your Clothes

Put in my clothes. And just go out, because from the mill into my camp, it was only about five minutes' walk. Tried to run into the camp quickly, empty, and come back. And the guards, I knew where there would be walking up and down. And I also had Jewish guards inside the camps. But this I didn't mind. OK, I gave them an extra few potatoes.

One day I must have mistimed it and I was caught by a guard just going into the camp. And that guard, this is unbelievable. He wasn't a German. He was a Ukrainian, the one, the volunteer who joined with the SS, the Ukrainians. And they were very, very anti-Jews. That Ukrainian got me to lay down just on the ground there. And he was beating me constantly for a whole hour. I just missed this old man with his rifle bat over the head, over the side, over the back, for a whole hour. He was beating me.

And when it was finished, he was-- I knew he will have to finish soon because another guard is coming as they change. So he stood me up. He said, I'm coming back with you into the mill. You're going to show me who saw you pinching the potatoes. And I was so beaten and broke and said, OK. I'll show you but I knew I wouldn't. He came back with me and he says, point me out who it was.

And before he said that, I said, no. I can't tell that. They put me against the wall. He took the rifle, he was going to shoot me. So I said, OK, I'll show you. And when we went back, then I knew in my memory, he can only have about a minute, he must go out, change guard. So I said, oh, I think here and there, and I just ran for it, run into the mill, among all the machines and I knew all the in and outs, and he could do nothing. He had to walk out.

I was beaten to hell. I couldn't walk. I couldn't sit. But the tragedy of it is and the hunger, the very next hour, I took more potatoes and I went through, because he took these potatoes away from me. I had to do it. So not only I left him with the potatoes. Had another friend of mine, he lives in America now. I saw him once or twice. I went to America. We always reminisce on this. He cooked the potatoes, so we ate together. So he survived and I survived. He didn't work in the mill. He worked in the bullets.

But every day, I pinched potatoes. I had to do it. And--

You said you were caught two other times.

Oh, another time. I was caught once another time, I was in the middle of this work, they took us out, just wanted about a dozen of us. They were building a new hospital in town. And they needed some laborers. Very hard work it was. Anyway, we worked there. It was also winter time. And there was such sadists. There sometimes you know how it is in the building trade. You're waiting for some delivery. And you had nothing to do. And there was a temporary toilet they put up.

So the German decided, you move it. So we said, OK. We'll undo it. It's only wood and some bits of steel girders [INAUDIBLE]. He said, no. You're going to lift up the whole toilet. You're going to. It doesn't matter if it's 20 of you.

We're breaking our back. We had to pick up the whole toilet, and move it. It was impossible. And it was when we had to get hold of the steel girders, that were there and it was ice cold, the fingers, I don't know if you know, the skin got stuck to the steel. It was so ice cold.

And anyway, we moved it. And then we had plenty of cement papers. So we wrapped ourself up with a lot of cement paper on the body to keep us warm. One day, it was about lunchtime. We knew these SS man are going for lunch. They got a bit drunk at lunch. And we were sitting there in the hospital yards. And I saw across all the shops. And I had some money with me. I don't know where from. And I saw a baker shop.

So I said to my colleague, I'm going out to get a bread. We were starving. And I did. Went out. I bought a bread. I had it in my coat. I walk in and who should catch me, the worst SS man, half drunk. He just came out from lunch, in the middle of the lunch. He was half drunk, tipsy. He saw me. What you got there? He put me against the wall. He whipped up his revolver. He shot once. It went right through here.

Through your hair.

Just through my hair. He shot another. Again, it went right through here.

On the side of your hair.

On the side of my hair, just near here. I saw it. And I fell. The second time I fell. I thought he shot me. And all my friends were about 100 meters away. They thought I was a goner. And there was a Polish overseer. He wasn't too bad. He rushed over to him after the second shot. He got hold of his hand. And he said, leave. I will deal with him. And he put his over away. I was like unconscious. I didn't see.

Then he came over to me. He put this revolver away. I never forget that. And I have got witnesses to that. They live in America. And he came over and he kicked me and beat me. I just couldn't walk. And he said, now take this bread and take it in the kitchen. And that was the worst agony for me than anything. After getting all this beaten and surviving, I couldn't have this piece of bread. That was the second time I was beaten like that.

Did you know the individual guards? When you say I knew, then I knew them. Then I knew them, not now. Oh, yes. Because they were the same every day. We knew who was a bit lenient and who is a bit-- that one especially who shot at me, he was executing and killing inmates every day. He was one of the worst. That is why I didn't think I had a hope.

Did you know their names?

In those days, I did. But I can't remember it. I can't remember it. Maybe I've got it written down somewhere. Some of them are dead. Some of them I didn't-- usually, if they wear a uniform, you didn't know too much. You could say, right, he is an obersturmführer, or he's a gruppenführer, or this sort of things. But we didn't take in, into our minds to remember their names or dates even.

But I've got some dates in here, because my wife kept on questioning me through the years. And she wrote it down. And my wife would tell you that very hard to get out of me something usually. Because not that I'm not willing, it's just that I just can't remember. I didn't think it would be important. My mind was to survive. And to look just what's happening now, not what will happen in the future. I want to know now, present. I want to survive.

[AUDIO OUT]

Mr. Zwirek, reel four. How did you know the other guard was a Ukrainian?

The Ukrainians usually wore different color uniforms, more green uniforms. And in most cases, they used to have on their lapel written which part of SS, or SA they belonged to. We knew them very well.

What else happened to you at Szydlowiec?

At Szydlowiec, nothing else. Because we were not long there. We went back to Skarzysko, as I said, to the main camp in Skarzysko. In Szydlowiec, I was only there for one week.

So the concentration camp was at Skarzysko?

Skarzysko, yeah.

What else happened at Skarzysko concentration camp?

Oh, the atrocities were very bad. Every third Sunday morning there used to come along some big kommandant from the SS. And they used to call selections what is called. We all had to come out. And they used to pick out anybody that looked ill, anybody that looked weak, anybody that they felt is not fit for work. They used to be taken away and executed.

And that we dreaded terribly. Especially, I myself was very short. I'm short now. I was much shorter. I used to always go and try and stand in the back, and put the couple bricks underneath my feet so to look a bit taller. And it was tragic to see they used to just go around. You're not fit for work. You're not fit to work. Push them in the side. And the lorry was standing nearby, took them away to the woods, and two or three of us had to go with. They were shot dead and then buried. And that every third Sunday used to be executions like this.

So they were just being executed because they were--

Unfit for work. And then the disease were raging terribly. In the summers whenever it got hot, typhus, scarlet fever, and all disease that you can think of. One day, I was again in trouble. I got my face got swollen up. I got a septic, a tooth was badly rotten in there. I think it was a wisdom tooth. And they had a doctor and a dentist in camp, medical attention they could give you. But only with what they had. They didn't have anything to help you.

Anyway I went in to him. My face was getting bigger and bigger. He said that tooth will have to come out. It's going to be terribly painful. I've got no injections. I can't do anything for you. So I said, what can happen? He said, it must come out. Because otherwise your body will get infected from all the disease. So I sat down. I sat down. He called in I think four people. One held my head, two each my arms, and one held my legs. And he told me to open it. He just put in a pair of pliers and pulled it out. It was bleeding for about 24 hours.

He did have some cotton wool, and it just told me keeping dabbing it and dabbing it. And he had to take the tooth out just like that. No medical help or attention whatsoever, they could do nothing because it was all Jewish inmates. And he was a doctor at home. And he was a dentist. But he couldn't help me. And he said, if you don't have it done, it will all get poisoned inside your body. And he did it. And it did help. I was in agony, of course, for a few days. But to pull out a tooth like this, I was in agony.

Does it cure the problem?

It cured the problem. But, those were things that were happening every day adventures in camp.

Did anybody try to escape from this camp?

Yes. Tried many times. One kapo was a husband and wife, a young chap, escaped because that particular camp, part of our camp was mixed. They escaped. They managed to bribe the guard. And we were all happy for them. Next day, they were caught. The guards gave out on them. They brought them back. They asked us all to come out on a PU, what's called, appell. We all had to stand outside.

They asked them to kneel down. They made a big speech. And nobody tries to escape. You can't escape from us Germans. We are too good and we are too clever. We will catch anybody. And as such, those two escaped. They were caught. And the military court decided they should be executed. And he just asked them to sit down in front of us, to

kneel down. And he just shot them so their head goes just like that. And we had to stand and watch. And then they said, right, now disperse, into your barracks.

But a lot of people committed suicide.

How?

Various ways, hung himself. They threw himself on the wires which I've seen, the electric wires, barbed wires, which I've seen it myself with my own eyes. They just had no will to live. Those people who had no will to live, one could tell a few days before. They were walking like zombies. They were walking like they couldn't care less. And they gave up. Oh, naturally a lot of people died, of course, from starvation and disease.

I remember one thing. I have a very personal friend. We were in Skarzysko together for quite a while, for a few months. We were sleeping next to each other on the bunks nearby. And he got TB. And actually you couldn't-- there was no question of cure. And it got to such a state at the end, near the end, he couldn't eat anymore. And not to eat a drop of soup, and he said to me, have my soup. And I forced little spoonfuls in his mouth. I mean you wouldn't have heard of it these days. Here the men had consumption.

I gave him a spoonful. He couldn't finish the little bit. Then I said, I can't take it anymore. You eat it. And from his same spoon I was eating. It didn't occur to us I can get TB. I can get TB like him. It just didn't come in. The food was there. And unfortunately, one night he just died.

When people threw themselves on the wire, would they be killed immediately?

Most, yeah, electrocuted. And if they were not, so the Germans used to often enough from the guardhouses, used just to shoot them down right away. Because they thought they were going to cut the wires or whatever.

Did you ever receive any help from the outside?

No. Not me, not at all, never.

Did you hear of people receiving help from the outside?

Not near the end of the war. When we come to it, and I tell you when after I was sent out of Skarzysko and all that though. Because afterwards, I went to Germany. But I personally never had anything from outside. And the camps that we were, we never had anything from the outside.

So what happened next? Next, I went to go into another little camp. We were sent out from Skarzysko when we heard that-- I think that the Allies, I think the Russians must have been from this side were coming. They were about 200 miles from Skarzysko.

Anyway, I was being sent to Buchenwald. I didn't know. We were gathered. We were sent by train. And there was another episode. We were in open carriages. And it was really hot, in the summer, June, July, God knows when, in 1944.

In the meantime, I was getting, my finger was getting a bit septic, swollen up, then my hand. Anyway, I wasn't-- on this train, eventually we got off in Buchenwald. And when we got off in Buchenwald, that was we thought that time we are all going to be gassed. When we arrived there, they asked us all to undress.

We'll go through showers. We went through the showers and German SS captain throwing ice cold water with some disinfectant. Really just throwing it at you. And then they shaved us, or inmates they were shaving everywhere, all the hair shaved off. And they gave us the striped uniforms. And they gave us a pair of wooden shoes, a shirt, the trousers and jacket, and a cap.

And it looked so funny. I mean I was short. I was getting a jacket that was about six times bigger. And the trousers, but I didn't mind it. Because it was useful. It was cold. And we were gasping for water. I forgot to tell you. Just before we went in the shower, because we didn't have any water for about a week. So we were traveling right through. So the trains didn't stop right through Germany.

So they called in the fire engines, and they put hoses on us. We didn't mind. We're just getting cold. We just like you see animals in the zoo, just grasping for the water. Anyway, it did the trick. It helped us a bit. So afterwards when we came out from the shower, we were all dressed. We didn't recognize each other. It would surprise you if you have all your hair shaved off, and you get in these prison uniforms, you can't recognize the next man next to you.

Anyway, we got allocated in Buchenwald with some huts there. We stopped there for about four weeks. I was lucky. I got a job help dishing out food to the inmates. So I was there. And they gave with a Frenchman. I don't know if he was Jewish. He was already there long. And he said, all right, you will be with a Frenchman helping to dish out food. And of course, it was a help to me. I managed to get a bit extra food at the end. And I was there for about four weeks.

Then they sent us out to a camp, a concentration camp, not far from Berlin called Schlieben. I don't know if you heard this word.

How do you spell it?

I'll tell you how I spell it. Oh, yeah. Here is Schlieben. S-H-L-I-E-B-E-N.

Was this a concentration camp?

Yes. Yeah, Schlieben.

What was it like, this place?

This place was-- is a boot-- a concentration camp just outside the town. As a matter of fact, we had to finish it when we came there. We were the first inmates there. We were the first inmates there. You see Buchenwald, was a big camp. And from there, they used to supply inmates to whichever camps they needed. The camp there was, with the first few days we arrived, we slept just on the outside on the grass. There was no huts yet built, no barracks. We built them.

But what happened was when we arrived there, the electric barbed wires was already finished all around. And next day, the German kommandant, with a great big dog he had. I remember like now, an Alsatian. And he had a few of his henchmen. And he has some women SS as well.

And the funny thing is that German kommandant, even so he was on top on most of them, he was not such a sadist as some of his henchmen. Because I'll come to that later. And I'll tell you why. Anyway, he said, it's an appell. He's going to make a big speech now. We should all listen carefully and the same old story. We heard these stories many times.

This is a concentration camp. He doesn't want any trouble. And nobody should try to escape. If somebody escapes, so many hostages will be shot, and all these sort of things. Then he said, right, there were a few German civilians around there, about a dozen. And they were civilian, like masters, governors, what they say. They needed some workers for the factories or for their own business, which they couldn't get Germans. They were all drafted in the army.

So as I said before, they needed a brushmaker, an electrician, a carpenter, a plumber. And what they call [NON-ENGLISH], to repair roofs and lay roofs. And I saw my father doing this kind of jobs. And every time in the summer or whenever I was on a holiday at home, and my father used to do this work, and I used to love to go with my father when it was holiday time, especially in the countryside. It was a nice hot summer. And I used to watch him doing this on the roof, jump up on the roof with him. When I got tired, went down, played with the animals and so on. It doesn't matter.

Anyway so I called up I'm a [NON-ENGLISH]. He called me over. And I remember the German was a short little chap, a short as I. In German he's like put his finger, if you're telling me lies, you can't do the job, I'll have you shot. Anyway,



I was confident enough that I could do it.

So the next day, I was to report to him. I reported to him early in the morning. And he said, right, that roof here here is leaking. You find. And it was covered luckily with a tarpaulin. It was easy. And I knew this job very good. So I said, right. I'm going to leave you. You repair this job. I will come back. And I see how you do it. You've got here tarpaulin. You've got here nails. You've got all the tar. You want to boil up, which I did.

And I done everything. And then he came back after two or three hours. Yes, you've done a marvelous job, very good. You're working for me. And it was very good, because I didn't need to work with a mass of the people. There were factories there. Most of them, I went in afterwards later and we were producing what we called [NON-ENGLISH]. The factory there was [NON-ENGLISH]. That was like hand grenade thrown against tanks. That was the factories there.

And they had a lot of Italians, the Italian prisoners of war. They didn't live with us. They lived outside. They were working there, and all our inmates had to work there. But I was lucky. I was working for him. And every morning he came to work. I went up with him on the roof, and I worked. Came lunchtime, we had half an hour's lunch. But we didn't get any lunch. We only got our coffee in the morning and a piece of bread. And in the evening, we got the soup and a piece of bread.

And I used to sit in the hut with him. He used to open his sandwiches and eat. And I used to sit and just watch him, like you see a little dog watching. And one day, I think it struck him. I don't think that German realized that we were in a concentration camp, just because we were Jews. He thought we were some criminals. And he said, don't you eat lunch? I said, no. I've got nothing to eat. He said, don't they give you? I said, no.

So he asked me. I said, no. I'm only here because I'm Jewish. So he bought me every day a slice of bread. For about six months I worked for him. Every day he bought me a slice of bread, which in a way, it was my savior. It was good. Now and again, he gave me a cigarette. He knew I'm not smoking. I took it in the camp, and I exchanged it for a potato, or another slice of bread.

But I was lucky. And in quite a few places, if you could only work where there was food nearby, it was half the battle won. But you had to have extra food. But nothing ever lasts. Eventually, the work was finished there. And I had to go back, work in the place with another part of the same camp. Then eventually I was sent in the building industry there. They were building, laying a foundation for some factory or something.

And I had the same things. I don't know. I mean it comes so funny. We were wheeling like little lorries or little whatever you call, just like you see in the mines, so wheeling out the coals right up to the edge of a big quarry. And this little trolley had to be tipped over with the cement into the Foundation and about six of us had to hold the trolley with a big pole, a long pole, so the trolley doesn't overturn.

And instead, I should be the first one here the trolley, with the other men, they put me right at the end. There were six of us. And I was very short. And I didn't hold it properly. And when they let the trolley go. It threw me up in the air. And I fell right into the cement. And the German civilians saw that. The German civilian. He wasn't a Nazi. He was a decent German worker. He was dressed beautifully in a cream suit, but cream white suit. But you could see he could do the work really properly. When he saw that he went mad.

He called quickly for help and he got all the others to jump down with ladders, pull me out. And he gave a dressing down properly all the other workers. And said, it's all because you didn't hold the pole right, and that little one held it right. And he asked me to take me in there to have me washed and cleaned up. And I said, I can have the rest of the day off and I should report to the kitchens. They should give me an extra portion of dinner.

So you'd gone down into the quarry?

In the quarry with the cement. And he saved me. He was a good--

He was-- wasn't he an overseer?

He was I think he was more overseer. I think him, the leader from the construction building I think he might have been the engineer or whatever. He might have been part of his own business. But he understood the work, because when he asked me to help, he put me down afterwards to work between two Italians, building walls. And he could see I had no idea how to put bricks on. He took his jacket off. And said, come here. I'll show you how it's done. And he showed me how it's done.

He wasn't a German Nazi. He was a German. And he treated us like prisoners of war.

Was it just you who he showed kindness to, or did he show kindness?

No, he showed to the others as well, I would say. But I think he felt a bit-- since he saw me I fell in there, in that quarry, that he felt a bit sorry for me. And I was so young. And he could see I was willing to work hard. But I've never been in this trade. But I survived.

Also, I managed to survive there as well. And naturally near the end of '44, they were coming over and being bombed by the Allies the factories, and all that. And a lot of the barracks got caught in the bombing as well. And some of our friends got killed. I mean naturally when you drop bombs, and the camps were very near usually the factories. So eventually that was already still 1944.

The various things was going on there. It's also unbelievable in the winter. All of a sudden, every morning was appell to count up. There must have been about 3,000 or 4,000 of us. So we've got one missing. I mean it's ridiculous really. It's so stupid. What is one person to them? One inmate? They couldn't care less. We must find this one inmate. We knew the man probably committed suicide.

We wait and it was snowing. And it was cold and these little thin suits that we wore, we were freezing. So the SS men came over after counting once and twice. We're going to look for this inmate. And picks about six of us, six men, pick out one of us inmates, saying, you come with me. One picked me up as well. Come with me. We're going to look. We look, and we look, we wait. We're standing there for about four hours. Eventually, we find him poor chap hung himself from the top of the ceiling. And it was cold.

They said, get a ladder. Go up and cut them down. I got a ladder. I went up. I was only about 15, 16. They gave me a knife I should cut him down. I mean I've never seen this man. The corpse was like as stiff as a pole. It was cold, really stiff. When I cut him down, he just bang. And so we came back. We found him. And things like this, it was tragic when you saw the chap and you knew him.

I just had to get it out of my mind quick. Forget about it. And after all this, now you're counted. Now you go wash. It was all ice cold water. The water was practically frozen like hardly dripping, ice cold water. Wash, you can't even wipe. And you go to work.

These episodes were happening day and day night. I was working such a long time there, especially when I was working on the roofs. So I tore my trousers, you know the only trouser. I tore them to pieces. And the commandant from the SS, the one who made that big speech saw me. And he could see me. I was working on the roof. So he knew me already, because I was working outside the camp as well. I had to repair their own roofs.

So he said to me, what happened? I said, well it got tore, when climbing on the roof and then climbing all over. He says, go into the store, tell the SS. There was an SS woman in charge. Tell her, I told you to give her another pair of trousers. I go in. And she was such a sadist. She walked out with a whip always. I go in there happy. I said, can have a pair of trousers. So she gave me two whips with a whip over the head. Don't tell tear next time. I went for the trousers. She gave it to me. And coming to that same--