

So you worked for a week in this restaurant. And this little boy--

Pointed. Called me Jew, yes. And I was back in my little room, locked.

Did anybody else say anything on the streetcar after he said that?

The first step I got off. I didn't know what would happen if I would stay. Maybe one could get up and he's an SS man or he's a police officer. I didn't want to take chances. There was another asset I needed. Nobody knew physically how much you can take when SS men caught you who lived with family, with another Jewish family. And if they hit you really hard that you cannot stand it, can you keep your mouth shut and not say where your sister, your mother, lives?

Most of the time, for that reason we did not ask. We did not know the addresses of our relatives. We were taken there. And this was security for me and for them. So when I escaped from that streetcar, this was the reason. I didn't want to take chances and I didn't know if I will tell where my mother, sister, or father is.

And then you just went back to your sister?

I was running for a long time. Then I called my sister at the hospital where she worked. And I met her. We went home and she made the decision that I can't go out anymore. For me to survive I have to be locked because of my looks. I could not fool that little boy even with my big cross and bleached hair. It was not convincing. And then how long was it until--

Oh, a few months.

A few months.

Yes.

You were just in the apartment this whole time.

Yes.

Would you do anything special to pass the time?

Reading. The same thing, the same magazine or book I read that probably 102 times. And talking to the cat. Whispering to the cat, who became my biggest friend and my biggest enemy because he could go out and I didn't. He could knock down a glass from the table not be afraid. When it would happen to me, I was scared to death.

What was the cat's name? Do you remember?

No.

And then there was a decision that everyone was leaving Warsaw.

Yes. We were told. It was not our decision. The German decision that we were going to be leaving Warsaw.

Jews will be leaving Warsaw.

Not Jews. Everybody.

OK.

And we were all in tremendous groups. And there was a lot of gunfire in the background, not exactly following us but

between the Russian [INAUDIBLE] and the German Army. And we were put on trains, loaded on trains, and after a whole day's travel end up in Tiegendorf, not knowing what the next day would bring us.

Were there other Jews with you, or did you not know?

We didn't know, but you could guess. Just like the little boy could recognize me, we could recognize. Maybe more sense than recognize. We behaved different.

And then in Stutthof.

Stutthof we already saw the Jews under the wire in camp and looking terrible, sad, underfed, frightened.

At this point you were still considered a Gentile.

Yes. I thought of it more than I was considered, I think. I knew I had that name which I assumed which wasn't mine, which didn't help at all. And time passed by. We did little chores, picking up trees, cotton trees. And the news, from time to time somebody heard from somebody who had a radio, or somebody overheard what the SS men said that the American Army's close and the Russian Army is getting somewhere close, that maybe this is the end of the war, maybe we would be free, but these were just guesses.

And the real proof, it was obvious that something was going on when there was a lot of confusion and less and less guards were left in the camp. And they gradually started transporting us from one place to the other. Sometimes it was just an hour, sometimes two or three hours, and we end up again in the deep woods.

So it just seemed they were moving you away from Stutthof for a few hours.

And permanently we didn't go back. But it became to us obvious that something was going on, that somebody is getting closer to that area where we were. And then less guards were left in the camp. And then one day we heard that music, that harmonica and singing.

And that was at Gross-Rosen.

Yes. This was when the German Army came in.

So as they moved you away from Stutthof, eventually you reached Gross-Rosen. Over how many days, do you recall? I know it's hard to--

Yes. Well, time is so uncertain now. I don't know if it was hours or days. And it was wintertime. Because when we were finally freed and walked back to Poland it was January.

So your time at Gross-Rosen was short.

Yes.

Just a month?

To know where you were was something you didn't care and you were not told. So it was not actually important even to know where we were as long as we're not chased or beaten here it was strange that we were stripped completely from dignity. People didn't matter. Just to fill your stomach for a few hours was very important. And to be alive is very important. And as I mentioned before, the closer you are facing a tragedy the more you want to live.

And your father was sent where from Warsaw?

My father was at Stutthof, and then he went back.

Then he went back to Warsaw?

Back to Poland. Yeah.

And if we can go way back, back to before the war, I just wanted to clarify some things in my head. Now you were the--

Third in the family.

The third oldest?

Yes. My oldest sister was Hannah. She's now 80. And then was Irene. Irene was the one who saved us all.

The nurse.

Yes. And then the third one was I, then was Frances, the youngest.

And after public school you went to this other town 30 kilometers away for gymnasium. And after gymnasium?

After gymnasium my sister was near Katowice. She worked there and I had a place to live so I went there and I registered in Katowice to a school of business administration. And as I mentioned before, Katowice belonged once to Germany and then went back to Poland. Most of the population there were called Volksdeutsche, which means partly belong to Germany, part to Poland. They spoke a broken Polish and broken German. This was not a good element either.

And then in August 1939, my sister and I went back to our hometown [INAUDIBLE]

Because you heard that the war was going to--

Yes, so we felt that the war would mean the larger cities the army will fight but we will be safe in the little town on the Vistula River. But we were wrong.

When the Germans did come into your town, were you made to wear badges?

Yes. When they started the ghetto and the labor camp, we all had the yellow-- We had bands on our arms and yellow stars. Yeah, this was our identification. The people who did not wear were not Jews.

Where did you get the armband?

The Germans brought them. I think the Jewish community, which they established.

The Judenrat.

Yes. The Judenrat had to supply everything for the Germans, and this was one of the orders.

And when you were taken out of your apartment, what do you remember taking with you?

Nothing. Because we thought they called us to leave the apartment this did not mean that we will never go back. We thought we were just going for a little talk.

To the town square.

That's right. But we never went back.

Was there what was considered a Jewish neighborhood? You said there was Jewish--

Yes, there was a Jewish street where the synagogue was. All the Jews who lived there lived on the Jewish street, just like you would say the [NON-ENGLISH] Road. It was a street but some non-Jewish lived there too, very poor.

And your father's store was in this neighborhood as well?

No, my father's store was across from the city hall. This is where they gathered all the Jews. And we lived on the same street which was called the Petoska. We lived across the street from a hospital and a Catholic church.

Were you within the ghetto? You went immediately to this barracks to work at this school.

We were first on that city hall place, all the Jews were. Then part they selected who will stay in this part that they called ghetto. They also brought Jews from the little towns around Sadowice. And then the rest of the Jews from that place were taken to that labor camp I where I washed floors for the Hitlerejugend.

And when you were there they just assign jobs to people at the labor camp?

Well, they gave orders, you do this, you do this, and there were some they didn't have anything to do. We didn't know what happened to them. You were on their mercy and their caprice. Whatever they wanted to do they will do.

You remember anything else about those Hitler Youth? You mentioned that they would walk on your hands and--

They had no manners. They were rigid. Young kids you expect they would smile or-- They weren't too happy. They didn't look happy. It was a military school.

And they were all in uniform?

Yes. Oh yes, with the heil Hitler.

Do you remember anything about the kommandant of that labor camp?

They were many. They were not one. They never approached single. They always were in the company of two or three with rifles or revolvers or armed, always armed.

And in the barrack, was the whole family together?

No. They had younger women and older women. My mother and father were not together.

What was your father doing in terms of work there?

He was working in the fields. Just like we in the beginning work in the fields, like digging, planting potatoes or digging out potatoes. You couldn't straighten out. If you ever saw people digging-- We didn't have any machinery at that time. It was very primitive. We had to be in a bending position. It was hard labor. Nothing you would pick to work.

You mentioned very early on that your father was in the city council.

Yes, he was,

Was he a member of the city council when the Germans came?

They had a representative of Jews. There were several, but my father was one of them. He was paid for every meeting. They had let's say one or two meetings a month. They paid him I remember something like 10 zloty. It would be like \$10.

And he wasn't asked to become part of the Judenrat.

He was in the beginning. Yes. There were two lawyers, my father, and there were about six or eight business people. My father was one of them. They didn't have any privileges for them. On the contrary, this was a very hard part. The demands came to them and they usually came either/or, which means you supply us a hundred pairs of boots, which soldiers wear leather boots. They gave you three days. And if you didn't meet the order, somebody died. So the position of the Judenrat members was very difficult, very responsible. And least to say not appreciated. What can you do?

Do you remember your father talking about--

My father just hoped that he wouldn't be there.

And early on when the Germans came in to gave an order that the Jews were to leave their homes--

Yes, to stay until next order. The order was a knock.

I see.

Not a gentle knock, let me correct this.

What other orders came about?

He had to supply tailors to do, I don't know, uniforms. And they wanted cigars or cigarettes. I don't think our town even had that supply. You had to perform a miracle to meet their demand. All kinds. The most common was shoes, boots. tailors. Cigarettes sometimes they did not ask the Judenrat to supply. They help themselves.

What about money or gold or jewelry?

They took this away at the first meeting we had.

Everyone brings it and just turns it in?

Not bringing. They stripped off your finger if you had. They didn't send you home to dig out what you put away because you didn't have a chance even to do that. But if you had a watch, a ring, a chain on your neck or earrings they didn't ask for it, they pulled it off.

What about food at that time?

We still had enough to eat.

You could still go out and shop?

At certain hours. You had to have the hour went on. Yes, you could.

What were those hours, do you recall? From 8:00 to 4:00. And I remember one time, and this probably was the last few days, it was just half a day, like 8:00 to 12:00 and then stay in. If it was quiet, we worried. If it was noisy, we worried. I mean, you could go to the window and just peek see if they're walking. You could hear the soldiers walking, talking. And there were some days that were so quiet that we knew something bad is going to happen. You learn to sense. Or maybe it was easier to believe that something bad is going to happen than to hope for something better.

Did you speak German?

Yes, I had German at school. So you were able to communicate with the guards. They spoke Polish too. As I said, they

were spies, some of them.

Before we started recording you had talked about the cemetery and when they uplifted the headstones. Would you mind telling me about that again?

The Germans ordered all the headstones from the cemetery to remove and to pave the streets of our town.

Were they just dirt streets before, some of them?

No, some of them had sidewalks but they were maybe in bad condition or some of them had nothing, and these were the sidewalks. And after the war when my son and I took the trip to Poland this was the only familiar place was the Jewish cemetery, which was there without headstones. But in the center of the cemetery was a monument put together all the headstones were again removed from the sidewalks and pushed together. Not a patch, but they were standing together. But the inscriptions and the names are completely erased.

Just by virtue of weather and age.

Yes, walking on it.

Were you ordered to help remove headstones?

Men, not women. Yes, men in some Poles. Not Jews, Poles were made to work too.

This was before the ghetto was established they had done this. Do you remember seeing the headstones in the town serving as sidewalks?

Yeah, when I went back.

OK.

Thank you.