

The movement of the train, very slow movement. You know when they are moving sections of the train on that final terminal. This is literally terminal was the right word to use. The train was moving very slowly, so you have the descending darkness, you see that we are being pushed through a tall masonry wall. Suddenly, it gave me the foreboding that we are being brought into the extermination point. Because we were not given any rations for the trip, people were packed like sardines. If you want to get work out of slaves you have to give them living room, you have to treat them with a modicum of satisfying the basic needs, subsistence to live on.

No water, nothing given for us to urinate or to attend to all other needs that are basic needs. And suddenly this descending darkness and this train moving slowly. The trains just like if we were going through the gates of hell.

That's exactly what I was imagining.

And the train came to a stop. When the train was traveling, we couldn't hear nothing because you just hear the noise of the railroad tracks, and the rails, and the wind, and so forth.

But when the train stopped, you could hear the screams of the women and the children in the other boxcars when they had women and children and when they were packed very, very heavily because the heat was unbearable. And they had no room to urinate, they had no room for anything, and there was crying and lamenting.

And it all suggested a premonition of impending death by some means that we don't know yet whether it would be gas chambers or they have something else in store for us. Then on the platforms, which on the right and a platform on the left which separate us from the other section of the train, there were big floodlights and there were guards that were standing on both sides with just maybe two or three guards.

All of a sudden you hear this the sound of a rolling door opening and a man stripped down to his trunks runs out of this heat. And he just runs. And the Germans, the German guards, they begin to hunt him like a rabbit. He says, you shove him. I have him. He says, [GERMAN] halt! And so forth [GERMAN] and then you hear two shots and you see this guy collapsing underneath one of those floodlights.

And by that time the temperature must have dropped. This was in May and you could see like a steam coming out from his mouth, you know, the blood was running out of his neck and he was laying there, a human being. All he wanted was a little air and he was shot for that.

When I seen this, this in itself was a-- I seen people killed before by the Germans. I have seen them in the Warsaw ghetto. But I have never seen this when you put all these elements together under such circumstances. And then the immediate logical conclusion is that we are not coming here to any labor camp if you begin to add all these things.

And as the morning began to dawn, there was a rabbi in a boxcar and we have a prayer that is said before death, it's called confession before the people. We say it. And he began to say the confession. And he had a younger brother, Hanof was his name, and that guy began to cry that he's only 20 years old and this crying and praying became very unnerving to us, although a man has the right to say what he wants before he dies. And we were still not convinced that this is the end of the line. Nevertheless, then somebody asked them that they should stop this sobbing business and all this and wait to see what happens in the morning.

In the morning when they open the boxcars, there came a Jewish crew that was working there, and the Germans, and the dogs, the whole circus. And they begin to roll open doors of the car and they begin to pile out the dead bodies from the boxcars. Ours was the only boxcar that didn't have any dead bodies. But from all of the cars they were putting the bodies-- The Jewish crews went in and they were putting the bodies by stacking them in pyres, one on top of the other in squares. And I seen young women, young men. It was just a frightening sight when you see so much death around you.

And we were bewildered. There were two hand grenades laying on the bottom of our floor. In other words, some of our men had hand grenades, and they were prepared to make a fight for it if we escaped. If we escaped and went to the woods we would have something. I mean, that was the intention. I remember when we emptied the car the SS men took

a look in the car. They seen the hand grenades and they ignored it. This was the final indication that we are slated for death. Because if we were not, they would certainly not allow something like this to go unpunished. They would want a guilty party and they would make an execution. They would try to show how they deal with something like this.

But you're all guilty already.

It doesn't matter anymore. And then we were put in a-- Those that survived the trip were put in the column five abreast. And the column was standing there and forming, and while they were forming and we've seen the crew--

And another thing is the cleaning crew that was working of the Jews who were part of the crew of this camp, they wouldn't speak to us. If we asked them, where are we, what is awaiting us, they didn't say anything. So you got the impression like you are on an operating table, you are in a hospital, and you see the nurses in white aprons looking at you as though you were dead already. We didn't know that they were not allowed to speak to us. We did not.

Then the column began to form and there were dozens of SS men on each side of the column, guards with rifles. They were going to escort us wherever we were going to go. And we begin the procession slowly. When I was walking, I was bewildered what was happening there. And my thoughts were very, very incoherent in a situation like this.

And the SS man that was on my left that was next to me-- I record this in the book-- he said to me [SPEAKING GERMAN], how old are you? So I said, [SPEAKING GERMAN]. I told him, I'm 18 years old. So he answered, [SPEAKING GERMAN]. He said, I'm 19. Then he says, [SPEAKING GERMAN]. It's a pity that you have to die. That's the way he said it. I mean, he meant it. He had no-- That was the way he felt apparently.

We were eventually separated for those that went to the gas chambers. But this moment, this moment in my life, including this question and answer and the piled up of bodies in the morning, on a beautiful morning, to be surrounded by death, this arrival, this is probably the worst that I had to face. Because after that I became already immune to these-- not immune, but I began to realize that sooner or later, they're going to get us, that there's a very slim chance of survival. So I was not going to get again, you know, I would not panic anymore in a situation that was awaiting.

You think the worst, and then if you survive then that's almost the bonus.

Well for some people who survived that particular moment was not the best thing because they perished later and they just suffered more. But this was such a terrifying, terrifying thing. This whole thing, arrival there, the descending darkness, the crying of the women and pitiful crying over the children, and then the killing of that man who just run for a breath of fresh air. The prayers of the rabbi to survive. He lives in Pittsburgh. I met him in Israel one time unexpectedly and his brother survived. All these things were just terrifying beyond anything else that I have experienced before or since. Although I had many close calls after and I was whipped and flogged personally it didn't affect me as badly as this.

I am not going to tell you how we got out of this situation because then nobody is going to buy my book.

No, you don't need to go into that. No, I was going to recall from another interview that I had that there was an orchestra at Majdanek, perhaps not at this point but it seemed that was all that was lacking.

I thought Auschwitz had the orchestra.

Orchestra was at Auschwitz, but apparently there was one also at Majdanek. Perhaps at the labor camp. But you're talking about 1943.

May 12th or May 13th.

But you don't recall any orchestra at camp.

No, no, no.

I don't think it would have been at this point in the camp. It would have been somewhere else, in the labor section. Could be, because unbeknown to us, we were not in a camp proper. We were in the entrance camp. And the reason they had the guards because they had to march us yet through a street which I think is called Chelmska ulica because it leads to hell, that would take us to Majdanek and to the gas chambers. This was our fate,

And I studied the records of it from a book that was written about Majdanek by a Polish writer and it's not been translated into English yet. And I bought it in Poland when I was there and it said at that period of time, there were no registrations, everybody was going, especially from the Warsaw ghetto, everybody was going straight into gas chambers.

Actually, I was twice in Majdanek. At this time when we were sent to Budzing, and where we were shipped from Budzing en route to Plaszow, we detoured in Majdanek, so I was their guest again. It occurred to me that I omitted telling you something about my Uncle Myrtik. As you know, we came to Budzing from this transport in the second week of May. That would put it about May 13th or thereabout. And when we arrived there, we found out that there was already one group of Warsaw ghetto uprising survivors who arrived there a week earlier.

One of the survivors, I believe his name was Kaufman, a young fellow my own my age, recognized me. And he said, I got something to tell you about your Uncle Myrtik. He was on our transport with his wife, that would be Ilke, and on the umschlagplatz after the crushing of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, they were herded on the umschlagplatz into boxcars. While he was in a boxcar with his wife, he was trying to bribe a Ukrainian guard either to let him go, which seems very unlikely that he would have asked him for it. Or he might have asked for water because they were selling water for something like 500 zloty a glass if they cut the price.

However, the Ukrainian guard, after taking the money, shot my uncle and his wife Ilke, pulled off his riding boots off his legs, his feet, and this is how my uncle came to an end. I believe he was born 1907 and this was in May of 1943. He would have been 36 years old. So this is the story of our family. We have very few survivors. That would be my Uncle Ben survived. My Aunt Rose survived because she was in Aryan papers and she was able to hide her identity.

And the only other survivors myself and my grandmother who left Poland on the last ship that reached the United States. My father died in Majdanek now we know and my mother and my youngest brother Meyer, in Treblinka. And Shimon still remains an enigma as to what happened to him.

A mystery waiting for, hoping for a miracle.

Yeah. It's hard to imagine that this late we would not have been able to establish contact since even if he lived in Spain he would know that most survivors went either to Israel or the United States or Canada and the he would have tried to exhaust these things. And there were no inquiries for me.

And then there's your book, too.

Yes.

He would have read a book about that story.

But you know what? All this brings me to this understanding that we the Jewish people are very old people and we have survived the rising and falling civilizations. And the Germans were trying to put an end to the Jewish people in the most barbaric way in the annals of mankind. They didn't succeed. And I don't think that any dictatorship would in the future succeed. But they never stop trying. OK, I think that we had enough.

OK. Thank you very much for sharing your story and your history. And I hope that it will be of great value for not only the present but for future generations and their study and recollection of the Holocaust.