

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

Pointed, called me a Jew.

Pointed at you.

Yes. And I was back in my little room, locked.

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

They didn't get a chance. The first stop, I ran out.

I see.

I don't know what would happen that I would stay. Maybe one would get up and say he's an SS man or he's a police officer. I didn't want to take chances. There was another aspect of it, that nobody knew physically how much you can take when SS men caught a Jew 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 what 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 security for me and for them. So that I escaped from the street car, this was the reason. I didn't want to take chances and I didn't know if I would tell my mother, sister, or father is.

And then you just went back to your sister's?

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 the--

Even with my big cross and bleached her. This was not convincing.

And then how long was it until--

Oh, three months.

Three months.

Yes.

You were just in the apartment this whole time.

Yeah.

Would you do anything special to pass the time?

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

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

No.

No. And then this-- 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.

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 Katyushas and the German Army. And we were put on trains, loaded on trains. And after a whole day traveling up, taken off. Not knowing what the next day will 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 behave different.

And then in Stutthof--

It started. In Stutthof we already saw the Jews under the wire in camp and looking terrible, sad, under-fed, frightened.

At this point you were still considered a Gentile.

Yes. I thought of it more than I was considered Gentile. I knew I had a 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, cutting trees. And in news from time to time, somebody heard from somebody who had a radio, somebody overheard what SS men said, that the Germans are-- the American army's close and the Russian army's getting somewhere close, that maybe this is the end of the war, and maybe we'll be free, but these were just guesses.

And they 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, it was 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.

Permanent, 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 away from Stutthof, eventually you reached Gross-Rosen.

Yes.

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. It was winter time. Because when we were

finally freed and we walked back to Poland, it was January.

January.

Yeah.

So your time at Gross-Rosen was short.

Yes.

Just a month?

To know where you were with something. You didn't care. And you were not told.

Right.

It was not actually important even to know where we were, as long as we were not chased or beaten. It was stranger to-- we were stripped completely from dignity. People, [INAUDIBLE] didn't matter. Just to fill your stomach for a few hours was very important. And to be alive was 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 in Stutthof and then he went back.

He was also.

Yeah.

I see. Then he went back to Warsaw.

Back to Poland.

I see. OK.

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-some-- 80. And then was Irene. Irene was the one who saved us all.

Is that the nurse?

Yes. And then the third one died, and that was Frances, the youngest.

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

Yes, gymnasium.

And after gymnasium--

After gymnasium, my sister was near Katowice. She worked there. So I had a place to live. So I went there and I registered in Katowice to a school of business administration. As I mentioned before Katowice was once-- belonged once to Germany and then going 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 a broken German. And This. Was not a good element either.

And then in August 1939, my sister and I went back to our hometown, because we thought--

Because you heard that the war was going to begin.

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

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

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

Where did you get the armband?

The Germans-- 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.

Nothing.

Because we thought-- they called us to leave the apartment. This didn't mean that we will never go back.

I see.

We thought we're just going for a little talk.

Out to the town square.

That's right. But we never went back.

Did you live in a-- was there what was considered a Jewish neighborhood? You said there was a Jewish street.

Yes, there was a Jewish street where the synagogue was. All the Jews who there lived on the Jewish street, just like you would say the [INAUDIBLE] 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 different-- across from the city hall. This is where they gathered all the Jews. And we lived on the same street, which was called [? Tapatoska. ?] We lived across the street from a hospital and a Catholic church.

And so you never-- within the ghetto, were you ever-- you went immediately to this barracks to work at this school.

We went first on that city, whole place, all the Jews went. Then part-- they selected who would stay in this part that they called ghetto.

I see.

They also brought Jews from the little towns around Sandomierz. And then the rest of the Jews from that place were taken to this labor camp, I call it, where I washed floors for the Hitler-Jugend.

And when you were there, they just assigned jobs to people?

You mean at the--

At that labor camp?

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

Do you remember anything else about those Hitler Youth? You mentioned that they would stand-- walk on your hands.

They had no manners. They were rigid. They were-- young kids, you expect they would smile. They wasn'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 commandant of that labor camp?

There were many.

There were many.

There was not one. And 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? That is--

No.

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 what-- they worked in the fields, just like we, in the beginning, worked in the fields, like digging, planting potatoes, or digging out potatoes. You couldn't straighten up. If you ever saw people digging-- and we didn't have any machinery at that time. It was very primitive. You 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 a city-- yeah.

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

He was the-- Jews, they had representative. Of course, there were several, but my father was one of them.

I see.

He was paid for every meeting. They had, let's say, one, two meetings a month. They paid him, I remember, something like 10 zlotys, would be like \$10.

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

He was in the beginning. Yes, they had-- there were two lawyers, my father, there were about six or eight business people. My father was one of them. Yeah. They didn't have any privileges for them, on the contrary. This was a very hard part, that the demands came to them. And they usually came either/or, which means you supply us 100 pairs of boots, what 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 saying-- talking about--

My father hoped that he wouldn't be there.

And early on, when the Germans came in, they gave an order that no Jews were to leave their homes.

Homes, yes, to stay until next order. The order was a knock.

I see.

Not a gentle knock, like [INAUDIBLE].

What other orders came about?

Oh, you had to supply tailors to do 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 of-- the most common was shoes, boots, tailors, cigarettes. Sometimes, they did not ask the Judenrat to supply, they helped themselves.

What about money, or gold, or jewelry?

They took this away the first meeting we had. The stripped off--

Everybody bring this, turn 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 to watch, a ring, a chain on your neck, or a earring, 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?

On certain hours and you had to have the arm band on. Yes, you could.

What were those hours, do you recall?

From 8:00 to 4:00. And I remember one time, this probably was the last few days, it was just half a day, like 8 to 12, 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 peak and see if they're walking. You could hear them, the soldiers walking, talking. And there were some days that were so quiet that we knew something is going to happen. You learned to sense. Or maybe it's easier-- 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 in school.

So you were able to communicate with the guards.

Yeah. And they spoke Polish too. As I said, they were spies, some of them.

Right. 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?

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 attached but they were standing together. But the inscriptions and the names are completely erased.

Just by virtue of weather and age?

Yes, walking on them.

Walking on them, yeah.

Yes.

Were you were ordered to help remove headstands?

The men. Yes, men and some Poles, not Jews, Poles were doing the work too.

So this was before the ghetto was established--

Yeah.

--they had done this. Do you remember seeing the headstones in the town, serving as sidewalks? No.

I never went back.

OK.

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