

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a videotaped (audio taped) interview with ["N"], conducted by ["N"] on [DATE] on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in [CITY] and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

Interview with Antonie Křoková

June 17, 1997

Antonie Křokov

page 2

June 17, 1997

***man's voice: You may start.

Question: Mrs. Křokov, could you please introduce yourself?

***man's voice: _____, watch out for _____.

Q: Tell us when you were born, sit down, sit down while you speak.

Answer: OK.

Q: And tell us about your childhood.

A: OK.

***man's voice: Sit down, sit down.

A: So now I can I start, OK? My name is Křokov Antonie, I was born on the twenty fifth, nineteen twenty five in Źdr, Doupov district.

Q: Where did you live when you were small?

A: Well, when I was small, my childhood, my childhood was mainly a concentration camp. And after I left the camp my aunt looked after me for several years until I got married. I got married and then my aunt was really very old, she became ill and died. So I was alone then.

Q: Tell us also about the time you were really small. Did you have any brothers or sisters, father, mother?

A: Yes.

Q: So tell us about them.

A: All right. I had parents, both parents, we were eight children, yes, eight children, but nobody but me alone returned from Ořwięcim.

Q: We will come to this.

A: OK.

Q: Parents.

A: I was still underage then and I only remember very little. Very little. Believe it or not, I remember very little.

Antonie Křoková

page 3

June 17, 1997

Q: Did you live in Beroun?

A: I lived in Beroun with my parents. My mother's grandmother was Jewish. She lived in Loděnice, granny was of Jewish descent and lived in Loděnice.

Q: Yes. Your father worked in Beroun?

A: My father was a circus artist, a circus artist.

Q: I see.

A: They had their own circus, called **Aleš(ph)**. That was world class, so my dad had Czech nationality.

Q: Did he own it?

A: Yes.

Q: The circus?

A: His parents.

Q: His parents.

A: Yes, but he was there with his parents. My mother came from a Czech family, and my father, and we were six brothers and sisters, and only me alone came back from the camp. I didn't meet anyone, until my, my aunt found me through the Red Cross in Beroun, in the pub where our family played, the musicians were siblings, doing it like my father. And she found me there and then through the Red Cross I was put into her custody and she looked after me then.

Q: Fine, but that's too far ahead, after the war. We would also very much like to hear about the time before and during the war. Did you go to school in Beroun or were you with your father?

A: I went to the first grade in Beroun.

Q: Yes.

A: I only went as far as the first grade and in the second year, in 1942 we were taken to Lety. To the Lety camp.

Antonie Kroková

page 4

June 17, 1997

Q: How did that happen? Did they come for you or was there an announcement asking you to come?

A: There were, there came, what do you call them, Czech policemen, right, they took photos of us, three times, they took the profile, the back and the front view. And wrote down the ID cards of my parents, wrote down everything, they found flyers in our loft, too, father was a partisan, so they found the flyers. And that is why we were in the camp, the whole family. Otherwise they wouldn't have taken us, children and mother, but since they took our father my mum didn't know where they would send us or where we should go. So she said: "Since you are taking a father from his children, take him with his children." So of course they did. They took photos of us, put us on a car, it took longer than one day, perhaps three. They came for us and they took us to Lety. We spent about nine months in Lety.

Q: Tell us more details about that, what it looked like there, where you lived. Were you together with your father, could you see him?

A: Yes, in Lety we could. We were all together in Lety but when we came to Oświęcim, we were separated, selected according to age.

Q: OK. Let's stay in Lety for a little longer.

A: So, what else.

Q: Tell us about it. What can you remember about that time.

A: In Lety.

Q: Your mother and father worked there?

A: Yes, they worked there, digging ditches, for those who died or were shot dead, beaten to death, ill or couldn't survive. They were digging ditches and throwing the dead into the ditches and then some of the men buried them, covering them with soil. The ditches were up to two meters deep and sometimes up to two meters wide. When someone was trying to run away and fell into it, then they came with the dogs and of course there was no

Antonie Křoková

page 5

June 17, 1997

escape. Once someone fell in there they beat him to death, shot him dead or sent the dogs in there. And the dogs tore them apart. That was the usual end. And we as children gathered dry spruce brushwood and made fire where nothing would catch on fire, and built pyres. They put the dead on stakes (the fires? See previous note), like wood. Like this, right. One on top of another. And then they poured something on them, covered them with the brushwood that we children had collected, threw it on top with pitchforks, poured something over it and set it on fire. When the furnaces were full they used the fire, just like that.

Q: That happened in Lety too?

A: Yes, that was in Lety, that was in Lety. In Lety there was also a little pond, nobody drowned there but sometimes, in winter they would chase us, children into it. And when we were reluctant, like children, they took us and dipped our heads in the water. They slapped us and we had to stay there and splash about in the water. Some got typhoid, diphteria, whooping cough, simply dreadful diseases, there was malaria, too, you either turned deaf or went crazy.

Q: You were ill there too?

A: I, I had whooping cough, and diphteria, but mainly typhoid. I lost all my hair, all hair, and I was completely bald. That is true.

Q: Was there any doctor who would treat you?

A: Well, I heard what old women said, that it was not a real doctor, a doctor for people, but for livestock, horses and cattle. But he treated people too. But how could he treat people as a vet? People. I don't understand that and I couldn't understand it back then either. They put some powder into sour milk for infants who came from the outside and the babies born there, too, so when the child was born, then the next day or in the following days it died, every single one, nobody could survive that.

Q: Did you children live together or were you with your mother?

Antonie Kroková

page 6

June 17, 1997

A: We were with our mother, all of us.

Q: And you father was somewhere else?

A: Father was among the other men, but that was one camp anyway. And there were barracks, like dormitories. And then men lived separately. First all together and then they separated them, I don't know for what reason. They simply separated them.

Q: Yes. Were you very hungry there? What did you get to eat?

A: We got something to eat. We would glean potatoes, how should I put that. After the potatoes were harvested, guys from the camp and the women took baskets, rakes, hoes, and dug for the potatoes, it was all frozen then. And then they cooked them, that was really something, we lost some teeth, too, I had three teeth pulled. And I was not the only one, other kids too, everyone.

Q: Who extracted your teeth? Was it a specialist or just a lay person?

A: No, no, that was the vet, the doctor. He was called doctor so he did the teeth too.

Q: Did you come there in summer?

A: I remember that only a little, I can tell you. That must have been, there was no snow yet but it must have been September, if I am not mistaken, yes, I wouldn't want to, but the air was cold, chilly and the wind was cold. So it might have been then but I wouldn't want to lie to you, I don't know what month exactly.

Q: But then there was winter, how was that?

A: Bad. They gave us some kind of sandals. No leggings, no socks. We small children got clothes, large clothes, like yours, or mine or from an adult woman, without any underwear.

Q: So they did not let you keep your own clothes?

A: No no no, they stripped us. They put us into, into the water there, they had poured something into the water and then they took us by our hands and dipped us three times into the pool, and they took us out, that's how we went through that. And we were scratching ourselves, so much that the more you scratched yourself the more you bled, it

Antonie Křoková

page 7

June 17, 1997

felt like burning, I cannot tell how.

Q: That was probably some kind of disinfection, wasn't it?

A: It was something that burnt, you know. And the more you scratched it, the more it itched and then it started bleeding. We had no vests or underwear there or anything like that.

Q: And you kept the same clothes on all the time?

A: During winter, summer, all the time.

Q: Yeah.

A: That was the bathing, that's how they bathed us.

Q: And who was guarding you, who watched you there?

A: There were some Czech gendarmes in Lety.

Q: How did they treat you?

A: Badly. They raped women, in front of us, raped. And when we started running away, they would shoot at us. And of course, the adults who tried to help, those got shot there, you know. Really.

Q: How many people were there approximately, do you know that?

A: Well, I was about eight.

Q: You must have been older since you were born in 1925.

A: Right, you are right. So I must have been sixteen or seventeen then.

Q: Yes, yes.

A: But I don't have my ID card, I probably won't get it either, you know.

Q: Yes, yes, I know.

A: I had all my children but had no ID, no ID card. I had two ID cards, when I had eight children, two ID cards but before then I had had a lot of ID cards. I returned them all because they were not mine. They even put Božena Němcová there as my mother. They put there my name, and the profession 'writer,' and mother Božena Němcová, and year 1935 they put there. They gave me a baptism certificate. As if I had been Božena

Antonie Křoková

page 8

June 17, 1997

Němcová's daughter. So I took it and gave it back to them.

Q: OK.

A: I have my mother's name written somewhere, but that is not the right name, that should be there. And father, I had no father in my ID card.

Q: And how was your mother, how was it for her in Lety?

A: My mother?

Q: Yes.

A: Mother was there for about two or three months. Those _____ months, two or three months. And then they sent her to Oświęcim.

Q: Alone, without you?

A: Without us, only with the older siblings, those brothers and sisters who were older were all sent to Oświęcim. And there, when they sent us to Oświęcim, after our parents, they said that they had been in the gas chamber, that they had simply cremated them.

Q: After you came to Oświęcim, you didn't see your mother any more?

A: No, no. My mother's sister said my mother had been burnt in the gas chamber. She had been burnt.

Q: And your father was still in Lety or went there at the same time, when you mother was going to Oświęcim?

A: My father never came back from Lety because my sister was raped there. And he was going to defend her and they shot him dead, you know. So he wasn't alive anymore. Only my mother with some brothers and sisters. And the rest of us siblings stayed in Lety. Later they sent us to Oświęcim, so we went there.

Q: How did you travel to Oświęcim? It is a long way from Lety to Oświęcim. Did you go by train?

A: By train. They put us on a train, a cattle train, for cows and horses. They put us on the train and then took us to Oświęcim. And when we arrived, there was a truck waiting for us,

Antonie Kroková

page 9

June 17, 1997

the line was not too far from the camp. And they put us from the train into the trucks, they waited there with dogs and they escorted us to Oświęcim.

Q: Could you describe the journey, if you remember something? You must have traveled for several days in that car.

A: Yes, the car was full, packed.

Q: Did you have any luggage?

A: No.

Q: Just like that?

A: No no no, just like that. We got nothing there, nothing, not even a goddamn piece of bread.

Q: Did they take all the people from Lety to Oświęcim?

A: All the people from Lety went to Oświęcim. We came there, in our clothes, and several cops were waiting there for us, they were German. They had dogs, so we all had to strip and they gave us clothes with broad stripes. Guys got striped pants, too. And they gave us no underwear, we were naked under the clothes. And then we got sandals, clogs with straps and we went to our blocks.

Q: Did they cut your hair in the beginning or you kept it?

A: No, they cut it.

Q: Did they shave your head?

A: Yes, shaved our head.

Q: Yes. Could you show that gentleman your number so that he can film it?

***man's voice: Thank you.

Q: Enough, enough, thank you. It is a relatively low number. When did you arrive there, what year? Was it in 1943 or even 1942?

A: Well. We spent nine months in Lety, so it must have been in 1942, I guess.

Q: Or rather in 1943, since you said that it was toward winter when you arrived.

Antonie Kroková

page 10

June 17, 1997

A: We went in 1942.

Q: To Lety?

A: To Lety.

Q: And we spent nine months there, according to those papers, otherwise I wouldn't remember that. And we spent nine months in Lety. Then we went to Oświęcim. So it might have been the same year.

Q: Yes.

A: In Oświęcim.

Q: Were you there with any of your brothers or sisters?

A: I was there as the last one, with the rest of us children.

Q: Yes.

A: So I was there with one sister of mine, she was two years younger than me. There was one brother and a boy of one sister of mine, eighteen months old. And a girl of another sister of mine, three years old. I was with them in Oświęcim.

Q: How did the kids live there, with you in the same barrack?

A: Jews?

Q: The kids, kids.

A: Yes, the children were there with us, quite long. But to tell the truth, they would have been there with us for quite long, but then a letter came from Prague or wherever and they were put in another barrack. We were in number nine and they in number eight.

Q: Still in the Gypsy camp?

A: Yes, in Oświęcim.

Q: In Oświęcim, Birkenau.

A: So we were there. And some professors came to Oświęcim, doctors from Prague, I was standing in front of the gas chamber. The first hundred was going in. And we were in the second hundred. If I had been in the first hundred I would have gone in then. But there

Antonie Křokov

page 11

June 17, 1997

was the hundred before us so I was in the next one. And that hundred remained. And then the professors and doctors from Prague came. My brother and my cousin were studying medicine in Prague. And they came to Ořwięcim and the professor recognized me because he knew my father, he knew him very well. My father was a musician so they knew each other very well. And the professor asked me: "What number have you got?" In Czech. And when I heard it I was all startled. So I stood up and said: "**Achtzich ein und vierzich.**" *** (It should be "**Einundachtzig Vierzig**" but I suppose she said it wrong. **So it might be "Achtzig Eins und Vierzig" meaning eighty, one, and forty**) You understand, 8140. And he said to me: "Can't you speak Czech?" and I nodded that I could. "So what is your name? What was your father's name" "Well, Vrba." And I started crying. And he said "This is Vrbov." And he took me out, right. He said to the German: "This one will not be burnt, that is a family that has to be freed." But mum had been burnt by then. Dad hadn't, some of the sibling had died too. And some were with me, the rest, as I am telling you. So they took me into the car, the professor said he would take me to his daughter, who would look after me. And I wanted to be there for the other siblings, for those who remained there. Because I didn't want to leave them there, I wanted to be with them. And three times I ran back to the camp and then the German aimed his gun at me, going to shoot me. And the professor said: "No, she's got someone there." Well, and the German said that I had but we had been separated. That they only kept me. And I am telling you, I kept running back to the camp. So the professor could not take me anymore but he at least said that I should not be burnt nor shot dead. That I should be sent to a camp from which I would get back home. So we left the camp then and went to a palace where there were Jews.

Q: Hold on, let's stay in Ořwięcim for a bit longer. Did you have a chance to see your siblings after you had been separated?

A: Well, I forgot to tell you about that, and you didn't ask either. I saw them, when I last saw

Antonie Kroková

page 12

June 17, 1997

my sister, she was very ill. And the two small kids from my sister, they were miserable, there was a shed, like for wood. And the planks were this far from each other so if you were small or thin enough, you could squeeze through. And I was running back to the camp then and I don't know why I got that idea, I ran right there, and they were in there. So I went in there and looked at them, and cried, took them into my arms, they heard the noise, so they ran there. And then the Germans from the camp took me to our room, we had no oven there. There was just a chimney, a so-called **tušimickej(ph)** chimney in the middle of the room. One of them bent me over it, held my arms and the other gave me twenty-five on my butt. When he let me go, I fell over. So they took me and put me on the bunk bed that was there. There were three beds on top of each other. So they put me on the lowest one. And in the evening when they were putting me on top, because I slept there they had to put me there and in the morning too because I was not able to climb there.

Q: When were you there, in Oświęcim?

A: In Oświęcim?

Q: Was it long there?

A: I spent almost two years there.

Q: So long?

A: Yeah.

Q: And can you tell me, were you still in the same camp?

A: No, later they put me to block number ten, they switched people. When you were in number nine, ten you would go to ten or eleven, twenty four and so on, the blocks were all marked. So they sent me to various blocks.

Q: Did you yourself work there?

A: You know what kind of work we had to do? They took a piece of newspaper, or paper, or cardboard and they put it on your arms and you had to carry it like this, or a shovel with

Antonie Křoková

page 13

June 17, 1997

sand and then you had to walk I don't know how far, half a kilometer or so. Quite far, I can remember. And those who tore it got beaten. Battered over their heads. One here, one there, over your back or your head. Or your hands were frozen so of course you had no grip, and then you would be beaten again. And then you would get another one and went again. We had to do that even ten times and each time they called us back.

Q: Who beat you? Were those kapos or Germans who tortured you like that?

A: Well, those were Germans.

Q: Those were Germans. Weren't those your superiors, the dignitaries?

A: Of course they were, of course, that's obvious.

Q: Were those Germans or German prisoners?

A: Those were Germans, called **Lagersturmführer**, **lágrunštu**, **Lagerführer** and so on.

Q: Yes, but for instance the **Blockälteste** or those who were directly in the block, it wasn't them?

A: No, no, those were normal people, like us in the camp.

Q: Inmates?

A: Right. Those were inmates.

Q: And were those inmates some of your people?

A: Yes.

Q: And how did they treat you?

A: Well, you know, what can I say, why are the camps called Gypsy camps? There were professors, doctors, Poles, all kinds of nationalities and not everyone was a Gypsy, not everyone was a Jew, or a Pole, or a Russian, there were Ukrainians, too. Why were those camps called Gypsy camps?

Q: I see, you may have come to the camp when there were no Gypsies any more.

Antonie Kroková

page 14

June 17, 1997

A: Yes, almost, the people were mixed there.

Q: Mixed.

A: They had been selected. I was in a Jewish camp, among Poles in the camp. And when we were supposed to go to other camps we were sorted out again.

Q: Yes.

A: There were Jews, and then some Poles, Ukrainians and so on. And in the other camp they sorted the people out again, right.

Q: How...?

A: Excuse me?

Q: Sorry, how did you make yourselves understood with the other prisoners?

A: Well, some tried and then learned for instance Polish or Russian, or someone who couldn't speak German or Gypsy, and that was hard, that is a difficult language. I tried hard, too, to understand, but ___ on television they were singing, so I would have loved to understand but I can't really. Every tenth word I get.

Q: Your mother tongue was Czech?

A: Yes, Czech. We learned it like German. And then Jewish, but I don't really remember that because only that great grandmother spoke it.

Q: Yes, and you never did any other work in Oświęcim than the one you described, that was more of a torture?

A: In the camp we only did that kind of work, but adults --- men --- dug the ditches. In Oświęcim too, there were the ditches and when someone was trying to escape and fell into the ditch, they got him and shot him full of holes. And then they made a stretcher out of sticks and put an old blanket over it and carried the person on the stretcher through the fence and then back again. They said it was a warning, so that nobody would dare to escape anymore. That was a warning.

Q: Yes.

Antonie Kroková

page 15

June 17, 1997

A: So you can see that everybody was afraid. Some might have managed, but those who got caught could say their prayers, they were done for.

Q: Did you go to call-ups every day?

A: Every day. Every morning and every evening. Sometimes at midday, too. When someone escaped they let us stand there for two or three hours. It was raining or snowing but they made us stand there for two or three hours and if you fell or passed out and someone else picked you up they got beaten because they helped you. And when they made you stand upright and you fell again, then the whole thing went on again. Either they shot you or kicked you and dragged you out and left you there.

Q: Yes, did you have any friends there, who supported you after you had been separated from your family, someone who you helped, too?

A: Not really, you didn't feel like having any arguments there or anything. Everyone was so cowardly there so that when they sat down, they were just happy that they were sitting down. And everyone was glad when the counting was over and we were going home. Everyone simply withdrew. We had set hours for sleep so you could not go to bed early either.

Q: Yes.

A: You had to sit there, not sleep. And the toilets, forgive me, when someone needed it, they had to hold it and wait for the time, and then everyone needed it at the same time. All at the same time. And there was one line and people went one after another. You couldn't choose when you wanted to go to toilet. Not even small children. Most people would wet themselves, whether they were old, or big or small, they had no choice.

Q: Of course. And how did you do it at night?

A: Well, it was like this. Those who had to go, they were in big trouble. Catastrophe. If I were to tell you what I saw with my own eyes you wouldn't believe me.

Q: Please, tell me.

Antonie Křoková

page 16

June 17, 1997

A: OK, I will but I am a bit hesitant. But I really saw it happen. You won't believe me. That is simply incredible. There was a mother and she had about four children. Little ones. Three, four and five years old. And the one who was two needed to pee. But you couldn't make any noise there, there had to be complete silence. So she took a bowl and thought that the child could pee into the bowl. They were about this deep.

Q: Bowls for food.

A: Red bowls, without handles. So the child took a pee and a pooh into the bowl. And she put it aside and covered it with the blanket. She thought that she would take it away when they go for counting or something and when the counting is over she would go to the bathroom and pour it into the toilet, right. But someone saw it and reported that. And then the German came and said, that was after the counting, when it was still under the blanket. And he said: "What is it there?" And she was speechless, she turned completely pale, paralyzed with fear. So he uncovered it and said: "What is this here?" and she, you know, I cannot even tell how that was. So he says to her "Have you got a spoon?" But he said that in German. "**Haben Sie Löffel?**" She nodded that she did. "So take the spoon." She had to sit down on the oven, believe it or not, I swear to God that this is true. ...She had to eat it.

Q: And what was that like when...

***man's voice: Stop, excuse me. Stop.

Q: Stop.

***man's voice: Please, don't block that light.

***man's voice: Let's close the door, Jana.

***man's voice: Roll.

Q: OK, may I? May I?

***man's voice: Yes, I am rolling.

Q: We finished half way through the story about that woman, Mrs. Kroková, when you were

Antonie Kroková

page 17

June 17, 1997

telling the story about that woman. How did it end?

A: Well, how did it end. She had to eat it, I cannot say that otherwise. She lived for two, three more days and then she was dead. They came there in the morning, that was the reveille, the people who came to wake the block up saw that the children were crying and one of them was dead. So that German came there, personally, grabbed her by her hand and dragged her down. She fell like a sack of potatoes, and the child the same way. He grabbed ____, dragged. It was dead, right next to her. So they took a stretcher and took them, took them away. So that was _____ everything, the whole block was up. Some were saying, she couldn't have done otherwise, who told them, the child needed it. So what could she do, she had to let him take a pee. He needed a pee. But no-one said that they had reported her. Someone must have done it because how would they know on which side it was, when it covered with a blanket, and which corner it was in. They can't have known that without being told by someone, so someone must have reported to them. That guy went simply straight to that spot. And he said, we as children saw it, we cried, and he said: "This will happen to everyone who will try to run away, we will shoot you and you will die like this, we will shoot you dead." It did occur there, three women tried to escape, but within the camp. There was power in the barbed wires, there really was. So as they were running away, there was lightning and it rained, and they thought that it would be good. They ran towards the wires, being shot at. And the wires, they were, you know, the wires, they were on fire, like covered with kerosene and lit. On fire.

Q: Do you think they wanted to kill themselves?

A: Directly in the Oświęcim camp.

Q: Did they, did they want to kill themselves, the women? Did they want to? You don't know.

A: No, no, they only wanted to save their lives.

Q: They wanted to run away.

Antonie Kroková

page 18

June 17, 1997

A: Yes, to run away.

Q: And ran into the wires.

A: Right. They wanted to run away, they wanted to dig out the wires, and then up. One of them had a shovel, going to take them out but they could not do that any more. They were shooting at them and turned the searchlights on. The searchlights on the **číhačky** or whatever those were called. So in the light they could see them clearly. They were three.

Q: Yes. And you, weren't you ill then? Did you manage to survive in good health?

A: Excuse me?

Q: You weren't ill?

A: Me?

Q: Yes. In Oświęcim.

A: I was in Oświęcim like in that other one.

Q: In Lety?

A: I was ill in Lety. There were many illnesses, so I was ill, but I didn't have typhoid, I didn't have that. I didn't have diphteria either. But a flu I had. Then I got pneumonia, there were illnesses like that.

Q: Certainly. Were you placed in an infirmary, to **a Revier**?

A: Well, in Oświęcim there were infirmaries. But I cannot say what kind of doctors were there. There were nurses in white, and doctors. When you came there, they gave you some medicine. But that was not necessary, the medicine because it was no use. They should have given us aspirin or something, not those medicines. There was no real treatment. There were no proper medicines. They gave you a pill and a little water and that was it, you were sent back to your block. That was all. And there were baths, too. There were brick-built swimming pools, so we as children went there. They always poured something into the water. Always the same thing, to prevent illnesses. And we would scratch ourselves, as if we had scabies or millions of lice. We scratched ourselves like crazy.

Antonie Kroková

page 19

June 17, 1997

Q: But there were lice, weren't there?

A: Excuse me?

Q: Lice. They were in the camp, weren't they?

A: Lice? They cut our hair but we had lice anyway. There were scabies, too, we had all kinds of abscesses, we were ill, you know. Unless you were sent to another camp from Oświęcim you were miserable like everyone. And I was able to get out of there, the professors rescued me.

Q: Yes.

A: And then to Auschwitz.

Q: And how did that happen when you left Oświęcim? You went to some kind of selection and they chose you for work? How was that.

A: I have just told you, in Oświęcim we were carrying those.

Q: Yes, but you said that then you went to yet another camp.

A: The other one? So shall I speak about Oświęcim or the other camp?

Q: Well, if you want to say something about Oświęcim, say it please.

A: Well, and then there were cars prepared for us. And from the things that were in the camp we were given other things to wear, striped. And those we also wore on the naked body. And clogs we got. And then they put us into trucks and took us to other camps. Those were called transports. The trucks were full.

Q: And before you were taken to that work, was there any selection? Did you have to be there naked so that they could see who was strong, was there anything like that?

A: In the other camps, I can tell you, we were rather dressed. We as children picked up litter, kept the camp clean, collected old bottles and cans, simply kept it clean. It was better there.

Q: Better. What camp was that?

A: That was Ravensbrück.

Antonie Kroková

page 20

June 17, 1997

Q: That was Ravensbrück.

A: That was Ravensbrück, right.

Q: You arrived there on the trucks?

A: Yes, we arrived there on the trucks.

Q: And you were mixed all together then.

A: Yes, of course. There were Poles, Ukrainians and a few Jews, before they selected us for another camp. And then on again.

Q: Yes.

Q: May I?

***man's voice: Yes, you may.

Q: So, now in Ravensbrück they selected you and put you in different blocks, right?

A: They sorted us out according to age.

Q: Yes.

A: You know, according to age. And then, the children who were thin and weak were asked to pick up litter around the camp. Collect things and keep the place clean. That was our work.

Q: Yes. Did anyone help you?

A: No, that was just us children.

Q: Yes.

A: They gave us baskets and prisoners took that away. They took it somewhere and we were throwing the litter into the baskets.

Q: Did you live there together with adult women?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Was the food there better than in Oświęcim?

A: Yes, it was, it was much better there.

Q: Yes.

Antonie Kroková

page 21

June 17, 1997

A: For instance, the food, they might give us food without salt but they would also give us oatmeal, you know. And bread, too, they gave us bread, like military bread, they called it white bread. It was not as white as real white bread but whiter than ordinary bread. And they baked such, like the military bread.

Q: Army bread?

A: Yes, something like that. They said it was for children. We each got a slice of that, it was much better there. Because we were used to that miserable nothing so now this was something much better.

Q: And you knew there was no immediate danger there, right?

A: Yes.

Q: When you were in Oświęcim, were you afraid of being sent to the gas chambers? Or you knew that you were out of it, that you weren't in danger then?

A: Well, when we were in front of the gas chamber, I was there, too, it was clear to everyone. After being there for two years, so I surely knew, and the old people, too. They would sort us out, they mostly selected Jews, but there were Gypsies among them, too, but not many, they treated Gypsies better than Jews. You may not believe it but it is true.

Q: Yes, that's possible.

A: There were many Jews, among them Ukrainians, too, but few Gypsies. Poles, too, I don't know how they chose them. Who was useful to them and who was not.

Q: Yes. In Ravensbrück you had more autonomy, life was easier there, as you say. For instance, in the evenings, after work, did you chat together?

A: Oh yes, when it was warm they let us sit in front of the barracks and so on. Whoever could, who could think a bit, they would talk. About whether we were going to return home and who would be there and who else would be back. Or if it would be only me and I would have no-one and nowhere to go either. So we talked about this and that.

Q: Can you remember, at least approximately, when you arrived in Ravensbrück? You were

Antonie Kroková

page 22

June 17, 1997

in Oświęcim, and the majority of people who stayed there for longer left Oświęcim in January 1945, that was the main time. Do you think that it might have been around that time when you left?

A: Well, I can't really.

Q: You don't remember.

A: I don't know, we, as I said, I didn't have my mum then, we had no-one to talk to.

Q: Yes.

A: I still had my siblings, my sister's girl and the little boy. And often we cried together, because we were hungry and missed mum. And the sisters would say: "Your mother was gassed."

Q: And when you went to Ravensbrück, were you alone then, none of your family was with you?

A: No, I was alone then.

Q: Alone.

A: I was alone then when I left Oświęcim.

Q: Did you know, did you have a hope that the war would end? Did you talk about it, could you hear the bombing or anything like that?

A: In the camp you mean?

Q: Yes. In the other one.

A: Of course we talked about that because we were afraid. One thing happened back in Lety. They locked us up in a barrack. And _____ then the planks, what is it called, the planks.

Q: They nailed planks over windows.

A: The, the windows. And they went to a shelter. And then they threw bombs and the door was knocked out, windows were all broken and we just stared at it. Everything in those barracks was dead. And some of them, who could find a hide came out afterwards, it was

Antonie Kroková

page 23

June 17, 1997

dark there, you know. And they came out and looked at that. So they put us in the other barracks because these were no use any more. Everything was smashed. It was so bad that it was no use any more. So they put us in the other barracks. That was in Lety.

Q: Yes.

A: That really happened.

Q: OK. Let's get back to Ravensbrück.

A: Well, Ravensbrück. There were Ukrainians, Russians. Poles and Czechs, too. It was rather mixed there. And you know, everyone asked: "How were you there?" and "How was it there?" and "What was it like?" and so on. And we said "Weren't you there?" They sent us here, we came from there. So they were telling us how it had been there and that there was bombing and that there was war and we were there and all kinds of things were happening. So we were telling each other about that. About work and all the illnesses. It was there, too, but at least there were no scabies. And there were no lice. In the summer the water was normal, there was a lake or something. And they went there with us. They watched us where it was deep. So that we wouldn't go there, so that we bathed.

Q: Could you take baths?

A: Yeah.

Q: In the lake, right?

A: Yeah, in Ravensbrück, right. We could bathe there, yeah. When it was cold, then the bathing was like, sometimes there was hot water sometimes it was cold, mainly cold. So it was like that.

Q: Were there any washrooms where you could wash yourselves a little?

A: Yes, there were.

Q: Right.

A: There were some in Ravensbrück. It was like in a kindergarten there, you know. Iron faucets, iron, like for cattle.

Antonie Křokov

page 24

June 17, 1997

Q: Troughs.

A: Troughs, yes. We washed there.

Q: So there were fewer diseases, too, weren't there?

A: Yes.

Q: Well, let me ask you, how long were you in Ravensbrck?

A: In Ravensbrck? In Ravensbrck I spent a bit over a half a year. And from Ravensbrck I went to, then we were in Auschwitz., but someone says that not, I don't remember clearly. Perhaps if I saw my ID, but I wasn't old enough then.

Q: Well, Owicim and Auschwitz that is the same place, the same camp. Owicim it is in Polish and Auschwitz it was called in German.

A: Where?

Q: Owicim and Auschwitz is the same place.

A: Alright, alright. It was better in Auschwitz then.

Q: Really? So you went to yet another camp from Ravensbrck?

A: Yes, I met a Jewish woman in Ravensbrck, with whom I, I went to Auschwitz. She was of Jewish descent. So we made friends. I only had a Jewish grandmother. She was a little older than I was. She cared for me, as I was alone, I had no-one. So we were together for about a half a year. A little more than that. And then, after the war, I still have the membership cards. And then, after the war, after the war I met her at a meeting in **Podbořany(ph)** at the Slunce. That is a decent cafe. And there was a meeting, someone gave a speech, children sang, and they showed a movie, so we met there.

Q: Where were you when you were liberated?

A: We were liberated by the Russians and the Americans.

Q: Which camp were you at then?

A: I was in Wittenberg near Berlin then.

Q: I see, I see, that was the last camp where you were.

Antonie Kroková

page 25

June 17, 1997

A: Yes, the last one I was at.

Q: You went there from Ravensbrück, didn't you?

A: Yes.

Q: Right. Was that a work camp?

A: That was a work camp, they made airplanes there, there was a huge factory hall where they manufactured airplanes. In that hall. When you were sixteen or seventeen they took you to work. Before then you would stay in the camp, sweeping the barracks, so that you weren't bored, so that children were kept busy. They gave us work. I also did a cleaning job then, polishing shoes, for the Germans. They gave me the cream, brushes, rags, several pairs of shoes and a small chair and I had to polish shoes for the **Lagerführer**. I polished shoes, dusted their office, swept and so on. They chose me for that.

Q: Yes. That was a small camp there, wasn't it?

A: Well, there was one, how to put it, there was a road, here was a women's camp, and across the road there was a men's camp. There were boys and men and here were girls and women.

Q: Did you live in wooden barracks or somewhere else?

A: The women?

Q: Yes, where did you stay?

A: Well, in those barracks.

Q: In wooden barracks?

A: _____, yeah, you mean the Germans?

Q: No, the prisoners.

A: Yes, in wooden barracks.

Q: Right.

A: In the dormitories.

Q: Were there bunk beds?

Antonie Křoková

page 26

June 17, 1997

A: Yes, there were, in those, I call them dormitories.

Q: Dormitories, that's fine.

A: Long houses, dormitories.

Q: And the food was better there too, in Wittenberg?

A: Excuse me?

Q: The food was also better there, in Wittenberg, wasn't it?

A: Yes, I tell you what, it was close to the liberation, you know. There was enough so that we would survive. We were nothing but skin and bones. When they liberated us, it was very windy, I don't remember when exactly, I don't know, but it was windy, no snow though, but it was in Autumn, I guess it was in September. And as it was so windy, the wind buffeted us and pushed us around the field, always to the other side. And the Russians came there, brought cows and horses and put us on the carts. They put planks on the sides of the dung cart, on the dung, you know what that is?

A: Yes.

Q: Where they put the dung they put the planks on the sides. And on top of that they put straw and the old people who could not walk any more and children sat on that. We had swollen legs, inflamed. I have had a surgery on my legs. So I couldn't walk either. And one Russian gave me a piggyback and carried me for almost three kilometers. He said: "Good girl." He took me and gave me a piggyback, you know. And those who didn't fit on the cart were put on another one, there were two more carts for those who couldn't walk. And those who could, they walked. They went with us and took us to a village and the Germans, who were there as prisoners, right, the Russians said, "Which house do you like?" And the women would say "Wow, that is a nice house!" So the Germans would go out. And they chased them out. And the prisoners from the camp moved in there. And the Russians said: "Take whatever you like, dress up." So the women were told to pick some clothes, after the people had been chased out. So they took us with them and where there

Antonie Křoková

page 27

June 17, 1997

was something they would put it on us. We spent about a month there. Because some of us were ill and the old people were weak. And starved. And the Russians killed whatever they could. Those were guys so they killed pigs, chickens, geese, anything they came across. There was, there was, how do you say that, abundance. We couldn't even eat all that. And you may not believe it but sometimes people ate a lot and then, poor guys, they died by the next morning, you know. By the next morning. Because they ate too much and they had weak stomachs so they couldn't cope with that and died by the next morning. And everyone was astonished: "How come he could and we couldn't and he died?" So that did happen. But later when there were doctors and they treated us, really, they told us: "So you don't know why they died after they ate too much?" "No, we don't." "Because their stomach was shrunk, they were not used to eating so much. And they were hungry so that they wanted to eat and they ate too much and died by the next morning." There were quite a few of them, quite a few.

Q: How did you get home from there? Where did you actually want to get to?

A: Me?

Q: Yes.

A: There were two Russians with me and one cop and I was escorted by a train, to Beroun.

They escorted me to Beroun and there I went to the local authorities (***Local National Committee - translator's note***). They asked me when I was born. I was about eight years old around 1942 so I forgot because of all the illnesses and I didn't know, so I said I didn't know. And our papers then were, I don't know, perhaps destroyed. Perhaps they archived them, I simply don't know. So they accepted whatever I told them. But they knew my parents. And there was a hotel called "The Green Tree." And my dad used to go there with my sisters and brothers to play when there was wedding or something more fancy. When there was a dance our family would go there as musicians. They were good musicians. So they would play there. And the hotel owner recognized me. She said: "I

Antonie Křoková

page 28

June 17, 1997

don't know if it is Maruška or Tonička." "I don't know which one it is." "What is your name?" "Tonička." "So it is you." And she says: "I will keep you here." So I stayed there and I lived there for about four or five years with her. And my aunt was searching for me through the Red Cross. And it took her long, very long until she found me.

Q: Where did that aunt of yours live?

A: Excuse me?

Q: Where did she live, that aunt of yours?

A: Well, she tried.

Q: Where did that aunt live, she didn't live in Beroun, did she?

A: She was not from Beroun.

Q: No.

A: She was not. She was from, oh my god.

Q: So she took you into her custody.

A: Yes she did.

Q: Right.

A: And that was like the social, social, she had no children, no children at all, you know. So she said that since I was alive she would like to have me. So she looked after me until I got married.

Q: Were you employed after the war? Were you employed after the war when you were adult?

A: I was mainly in the pub.

Q: So you were there, I see.

A: I washed up and mopped and cleaned the stairs. I didn't want to be unemployed. I was afraid that they would send me back. I was afraid, you know, of being sent back to the camp so I looked for work myself. And when my aunt took me to hers I still wanted to work, I was still afraid. So she always took me to the pub. Told me that I would work in the

Antonie Křoková

page 29

June 17, 1997

pub so that she could come to see me. So I started learning. I learned to really cook.

Although in the beginning it was different. Washing up, cleaning the stairs, sweeping the courtyard, and I was glad I could do all those jobs. And that I was strong enough to manage the broom. And that I was clean, that I could dress nicely, you know. And I felt much better when I was dressed nicely. I wanted to be among people all the time. And my aunt told me: "You are in the pub all the time." And I learned to cook and keep the place clean. The hotel owner taught me to iron, everything, you know. So I was happy that I could do so many jobs that I couldn't do

Q: Did you meet your husband there?

A: Excuse me?

Q: Did you meet your husband there?

A: No, I met him when I was living here in the Sudetenland. In Mariánské Lázně and Tachov. I learned to cook there. I could do some before but there I learned a lot. And he was training to be a bricklayer. So he made friends with my aunt. And then we somehow got together.

Q: Was he also persecuted, your husband? Or was he Czech?

A: No, he was Slovak. A Ukrainian from Sub-Carpathian Ukraine.

Q: Yes.

A: But he had Czech education.

Q: Right.

A: He had Czech education schools and spoke Czech, he spoke perfect Czech.

Q: Yes.

A: He was from there and moved to Vítkov with his parents, that was about two kilometers away from Tachov, maybe not even that far. They went shopping on foot, they had horses, some livestock, you know, a small landholding. They walked from the village to Tachov. Well, and he was training to be a bricklayer. And then we got together, you know,

Antonie Křoková

page 30

June 17, 1997

I liked to do every job. You know, everything interested me, cows and everything. And my aunt said: "What else are you going to learn? You are interested in everything." My mother kept goats when we were small, for milk for us, you know. And I could milk the goat. So I thought that I could milk the cow like the goat. So I kept squeezing until I discovered how to do that. The cows were mellow and I learned to milk them as if I had always done it. That was at his parents'.

A: Yes. So you both remained there, working on the farm.

Q: Yes, on the farm. He didn't leave me in the pub since I was going to marry him. So I stayed there on the farm with his parents.

Q: Did you live all your life with his parents?

A: Yes.

Q: Right. And how many children have you got?

A: Eight.

Q: Eight kids? Do they live nearby?

A: Excuse me?

Q: Do they live somewhere nearby?

A: How?

Q: Do you see them now and then?

A: Well, not very much any more.

Q: OK. But I can see that your daughter lives nearby.

A: Yes, she lives near **Podbořany(ph)**. That's two kilometers.

Q: Right.

A: Well, and then right here in **Podbořany(ph)** two sons of mine live, right, and then two daughters live in Klášterec and one is in Česká Lípa, in Nový Bor. Each has his or her own job.

Q: Yes.

Antonie Křoková

page 31

June 17, 1997

A: They are doing fine, one is a shopkeeper, another one has a pub.

Q: So you are glad, happy with them, aren't you?

A: Yes, I am. One daughter has a pub in Žatec. She has a pub too, it is hers now.

Q: Right.

A: My children are talented. I am not as gifted, I had nowhere to, you know. I know what I knew in the first grade. I can count, count money for instance - - (laughter) - -.

Q: But you supported your children to...

A: Oh yes.

Q: ...go to school.

A: When it comes to money, they laugh at me, they say, "Mum you cannot read and write but no-one can fool you about money." Someone has to calculate with a pen and paper but I do it in my mind. I don't need that. I need my children to help me now and then, to write something or so, they can do that, they can count. They are clever, sensible.

Q: So thank you very much.

A: - - (laughter) - - God bless you.

End of tape 1.

Tape 2

***man's voice: I am rolling, you may start.

Q: OK. So, Mrs. Křoková,

***man's voice. Quiet please.

Q: I want to ask you, when you were in the camp, did you have a chance, did it happen at all that people would trade things, that you would manage to get something and then trade it with someone else, did anything like that happen in the camp? Do you remember?

A: ___After the war?_____

Q: No no no, in the camp.

A: Right.

Antonie Kroková

page 32

June 17, 1997

Q: In Auschwitz, in Auschwitz.

A: Alright, in Auschwitz. You mean in Oświęcim, right? And in what way?

Q: Well, if people were bartering, when they for instance worked somewhere and then brought something home and tried to trade it.

A: So you mean this.

Q: Did anything like this happen?

A: Yes, I remember, but you know how it is when you get older.

Q: Of course I do.

A: However, I remember that. When we came home from work. There was a lot of them, but mainly the young, strong ones went to work, digging ditches, digging. The old ones and children, they were taken to work when they were seven, eight years old. As I have told you, they had to carry the pieces of paper and so on.

Q: You never did any other work in Oświęcim than that?

A: No.

Q: Only this kind of humiliating work.

A: No, no no no no no. Only in the camp we had to collect stuff, except for Sundays. They didn't leave us alone, as children we had to do that. But guys had to work day in day out. Twice we had to go to the **Zählappell** or whatever you call it in Czech. The counting. That was twice a day. In the morning and in the evening. And when you returned from work you were very tired. And when someone passed out and couldn't get up again they could say their prayers, they would not survive. Because they either shot them dead or beat them to death. And nobody was supposed to help them, no-one was allowed to help, no-one.

Q: Yes. Were there any extraordinary call-ups or just the regular ones? Once you said that someone had run away.

A: No, those were regular.

Q: Yes.

Antonie Kroková

page 33

June 17, 1997

A: Regular. But when someone had run away or someone was ill and stayed in bed in the camp because they were seriously ill, they made us stand there for two, three hours, the whole camp, and kept counting. And when we are in bed and I look and see that that person is not here. So they went to the barrack and saw that the person was in bed. And when he or she could not walk any more they shot them dead right away or beat or kicked them to death, they found a reason for their absence. And then they crippled them or even killed them.

Q: Yes. Earlier you said that when someone had run away you had to stand there almost for the whole day. Did anyone manage to escape from your camp? Did that person run away from your camp?

A: Yes, yes. Of course.

Q: Right.

A: That was the one I told you about, they shot him dead then.

Q: So that was the only case you witnessed there?

A: I saw that.

Q: That one case. Did you hear about any others? Any other people who would run away?

A: No, no.

Q: Once you said that you had been punished, that they bent you over that chimney and you got beaten.

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Was that a common thing? Did that happen to other people too, every day?

A: Well, they couldn't do anything because no-one was allowed to stand up for you. So nobody would.

Q: Right.

A: If someone had stood up for you, they would have been shot dead or beaten or kicked to death.

Antonie Kroková

page 34

June 17, 1997

Q: Did the kapos do that?

A: Excuse me?

Q: Did the kapos do that?

A: The kapos? Well, that depended. For instance you would be good and I would be bad.

You understand? Right. So they differed, too. Sometimes they would say to each other:

“OK, leave her.” Or “Leave him alone.” Like that.

Q: Yes.

A: So that was between them and sometimes they would listen to one another.

Q: Were there any kinds of punishment other than that? Not only regarding you, others as well.

A: No.

Q: Your neighbors and so on.

A: No, no.

Q: No.

A: No, no, not really.

Q: Only bending over the chimney and spanking.

A: Everyone was responsible for himself and no-one asked anyone if they were guilty or not.

Q: Yes.

A: Only you alone, you got kicked or beaten or shot, and then you couldn't speak any more, you were dead. And if you had been alive and called for help, nobody was allowed to approach you anyway. And when someone had the heart or courage, they got shot when they ran to you.

Q: Did you have any chance to be in touch with or learn about some other, neighboring camps? There must have been craftsmen who could come into the camps, or children, the **Läufer** who ran from one place to another. Did you have any chance to hear about life in other camps? I mean within Oświęcim?

Antonie Kroková

page 35

June 17, 1997

A: Right, right, I understand what you mean. When adults talked about that, we children understood that, we understood and were afraid that it would get even worse than it already was. I was terrible there, really cruel. How should I explain that to you, I don't know, it was very bad there.

Q: Yes, I know.

A: Really bad.

Q: I understand. When you came to the camp in Oświęcim, was it still a Gypsy camp? Were there still any Gypsies or there were no Gypsies any more? You have "Z" here.

A: It was mixed there, you know. But the majority was gone.

Q: Were most people dead by then?

A: Yes, they were. Most had been gassed and the few people, the younger ones who went to other camps could be counted with the fingers on one hand.

Q: Yes. Which means that when you arrived in Oświęcim your mother was dead and so were most of the original people there, the Gypsies. Those weren't there any more, only a few were left. You were all mixed there then.

A: Yeah. Not even that.

Q: Not even that.

A: Well, many, many of them were gone.

Q: And did actually anyone know that you were from a half Gypsy family, did anyone know that about you?

A: No, I am not of Gypsy descent.

Q: Not at all?

A: No, my mother wasn't, nor my dad. My father was a circus artist. Artists are not Gypsies.

Q: Right.

A: And my mother was Czech. And my grandmother was...

Q: Your grandmother was Jewish.

Antonie Křoková

page 36

June 17, 1997

A: Jewish.

Q: I want to ask about what you know about that grandmother. Did you go to see her?

A: My grandmother? She lived in Loděnice. We used to go to see her as children.

Q: You did.

A: My mother was born in Beroun and baptized in Loděnice. And my grandmother lived there. But my mother was born in Beroun.

Q: Yes.

A: She was from Beroun.

Q: And your grandmother when you came to her, was it different there than at your place?
Was she religious for instance?

A: My grandmother?

Q: Yes, your grandmother, the Jewish one.

A: She was religious, oh yes she was.

Q: I see.

A: She was religious.

Q: Did she go to a Jewish transport then?

A: Yes, she did and never came back. Poor old woman.

Q: She never came back.

A: No, she remained there.

Q: Did she go before you were taken to Lety?

A: Yes. She was taken away one week and the following week we were taken away.

Q: The following week.

A: A week later we went too.

Q: Yes. Could you make yourself understood with the other prisoners you were there with?

Did you get on well? No matter whether you were from Bohemia, Poland or Ukraine?

A: You mean in the camp?

Antonie Kroková

page 37

June 17, 1997

Q: Yes.

A: Well, you know, I have told you. There were all kinds of nationalities. There were Ukrainians, Poles, among them some Jews, too, and Gypsies. Czechs, too, all kinds of people.

Q: Yes.

A: All kinds.

Q: I have asked you about that already, but I would like to know more. When you were in Oświęcim, and you had some free time, did you ever sing or amuse yourselves a little bit, was there anything like that?

A: In Oświęcim?

Q: Yes.

A: I don't remember.

Q: You don't remember.

A: Believe me, I don't.

Q: Was it so tough there that you couldn't?

A: Nobody felt like singing there. And we were not allowed either, even if some people had been up to entertain others. No, nobody was. They wouldn't allow that. That was the terrible thing.

Q: Did any high German officers come to see you?

A: Excuse me?

Q: Did any German officers ever come to see you?

A: Most of them were.

Q: What did they have?

A: The rank, stars here.

Q: Yes.

A: And medals and stars and...

Antonie Křoková

page 38

June 17, 1997

Q: When did you come across with them? During the call-ups?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Right. Otherwise you didn't get to see them much, did you?

A: Who do you mean?

Q: The German officers.

A: Yes, that was rather common. They were there all the time. They had their barracks, what were they called? They were wooden, too, but better. And we would see them regularly, daily.

Q: Did they talk to you?

A: Yes, they did. They spoke to us normally.

Q: Yes, when they wanted something from you, they asked you to do that, didn't they?

A: I can tell you something, since you reminded me of that. There was one soldier, an officer, a soldier, one of the Germans _____. He had a lot of children like we were. And what he would do with us was this, he asked us to stand around him, to hold our hands, like in "Ring Around the Rosie." And he sat on an old pan, he put a piece of board on it and sat on that and held a stick in his hand, I have said that already, he held that walking stick, that reminded me. And when he liked someone, he grabbed their necks with the stick and pulled them towards himself and let them sit on his lap. And said to them in German: "Can you understand German?" Some didn't and some said they could. And sometimes he would play with us for a half hour or so.

Q: He played with you.

A: Yeah.

Q: With you, too.

A: And he picked me several times and, believe it or not, I recognized him after the war.

Q: Where did you see him?

A: In a newspaper.

Antonie Křoková

page 39

June 17, 1997

Q: Oh, in a newspaper.

A: I recognized him in a newspaper and he always pulled me towards himself with the stick, slowly, and when I sat on his lap, he held me like, like a child, you know. And he always said: "Are you afraid?" "No." "Can you speak German?" So I talked to him. And he would stroke me. "You see, what good German you speak?" he would say "You will go home." he said to me. And that was true. I went home from there. They chose me, the professors, and I left the camp. Went from one camp to another.

Q: I didn't quite understand the story about the professors, who were they and where did they come from? The professors.

A: They came there to rescue someone who they knew, or sons or daughters that studied under them in Prague.

Q: Yes.

A: So they came there, right, for those who they knew. And by chance there was my brother and cousin in Prague and they recognized me. And then the German wanted to shoot me dead when I kept running away back to the camp and he said: "No." And then they said that I had to have someone in the camp and that we had been separated. So I wouldn't see them any more. And when I returned, as I have told you, I saw my sister's boy and a girl, both dead.

Q: Mrs. Křoková, you said that you had stayed in various blocks, in number ten and so on. Were all those barracks wooden?

A: Yes, they were.

Q: Weren't some of them brick-built?

A: No.

Q: No, they were all wooden, with the chimney in the middle.

A: Yes, yes, I know. They were all the same.

Q: Yes.

Antonie Kroková

page 40

June 17, 1997

A: Those were just barracks, just barracks. Like barns, with huge gates.

Q: Yes.

A: And there were numbers written on them, but otherwise they were the same. The beds, bunk beds, three on top of each other.

Q: Yes.

A: Everyone was so skinny there. Thin legs, like two fingers. Just knees and the skeleton. Just the skeleton. And you can assume that many didn't survived that, they died by the next morning.

Q: You were in a bit better condition when you got over that illness, weren't you?

A: I don't know, when I came to the other camp, it felt much better there.

Q: You recovered a little, didn't you?

A: Yes, it was better there, slightly better. It was not such a struggle there, and so much beating and heartache, people would get beaten when they deserved, too, though. They were kept in line there, too.

Q: Yes.

A: I remember many details, every word I have said, that is true, I remember that. But otherwise, sometimes I don't know.

Q: Well.

A: For instance I don't recall a lot that I should.

Q: It has been a long time. If you could remember some other stories that stuck in your mind, we would certainly be glad. But if not, I will at least ask you whether after the war, when you think of that time in retrospect, how do you see it? Was there anything you learned from it, any experience you got? What is the retrospective view of the time in the camp for you today?

A: We did speak about it, of course we did. And especially among children. We talked about it and those children who had a clue, they cried. Believe me or not, I would often touch my

Antonie Kroková

page 41

June 17, 1997

head and feel that I had no hair. And when I was in that pub, in that hotel, I wore a bandanna on my head, I can show it to you.

Q: I see.

A: The owner gave me this bandanna. My head had been shaven, God forgive, I looked like a hedgehog." So she gave me this bandanna. But the hair sticks through the bandanna anyway, like thistle. And I would often cry, I came home and cried, Jesus, I came home and said: "I used to have so beautiful hair and now I have nothing." But the women always told me: "Come on, the hair will grow again, the main thing is that you are healthy, and then the hair will grow again. You'll see, it will grow even more beautiful than before." Well, and then it did grow.

Q: Have you ever told your children about all these experiences?

A: Excuse me?

Q: If you have ever told your children about those experiences?

A: Well, my aunt told me a lot. When we went to Lety, to Oświęcim, I say, my sister said, "I am getting hungry." And there were those gas chambers, they were burning them, and I said: I said ____: "You will soon be fine." I said: "They are preparing something for us, roasting some salami." I thought that they were making something on the fire, roasting salami for those who were coming, the visitors. And then, when we came there, we said that to our aunts, but no, they said, they were burning people in gas, first they gassed them, there were some levers, the people stayed in the gas for ten minutes, you know, there were levers like on trains, so they did it with the levers and then there were only the hot iron bits and they fell through into the fire down there. And the smoke was coming up through the chimney. And we were there.

Q: Did someone tell you about this?

A: Yeah.

Q: You didn't see it yourself, someone told you, didn't they?

Antonie Kroková

page 42

June 17, 1997

A: Yes, the aunts told me.

Q: Yes.

A: But as we were approaching the place, my sister kept crying that she was hungry. And I told her: "Don't cry, they are roasting some salami for us." And when I said that to the aunts, I told them: "They were roasting salami and didn't give us any." And she said, they all cried, you know, she said: "That wasn't any salami, those were people who had gone to the gas, gas chamber." The shack you saw, the wooden one, that was all wooden and brick-built inside. Inside there were bricks and on top there were planks. And as I said, there were the levers, like on trains, so they went in for ten minutes and in another ten minutes the levers were pulled, you know. Always just a short while and then another hundred went in.

Q: Were you afraid that it could happen to you, too?

A: Of course we were. I've got a heart condition, and I cannot hear properly, that's from the camp, and when I am ill, like I was recently, I stayed in bed quite long. Until today I didn't walk around at all. And today I am able to speak a little. I said to myself, I said: "If they," yesterday I said that to myself: "If they are coming tomorrow," I said, "I will have to apologize, so that they are not upset." I lost my voice. You wouldn't have been able to talk to me, honestly. I could only mime "What do you want?" and only whispered and couldn't say a word.

Q: But today you speak very well.

A: Well, yes, thank God.

Q: Do your children know about all that?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: No.

Q: You never told them?

Antonie Křoková

page 43

June 17, 1997

A: No.

Q: No. So now you will get...

***man's voice: _____ The lady asks you whether the girls, your daughters know about all that.

A: Of course they do.

Q: Right.

A: Excuse me, I didn't hear that. They all know, I told them everything.

Q: Right.

A: I told them that they live in abundance. That they were not aware of what they had. Even if someone is really poor. That's not poverty and hunger when you have only bread and perhaps potatoes, to me that is that you have something to eat. Even black coffee. But nowadays people don't even drink that, they always want something better than they should. When I visited my daughter in Nový Bor, the breakfast she made must have cost a fortune, you know. We don't have breakfast in the morning, he doesn't and neither do I, I can't, I take loads of pills, my medication. "Can you show my pills?"

Q: All right.

A: You will be surprised when you see how many pills I take. For various illnesses.

Q: You don't have to.

A: It was there, I don't know now.

Q: You don't have to, really.

A: I am telling you, I am fit now, and I am glad.

Q: OK. So actually you...

A: This is enough..

Q: appreciate the life you have now. After all that you have been through.

A: At least I have a lot of children and they like me and come to visit me. And when it's my name day or birthday, at least two or three of them come, sometimes just one and other

Antonie Kroková

page 44

June 17, 1997

times more of them. They all have their jobs.

Q: Absolutely. You are retired now, aren't you?

A: Right.

Q: Are you retired?

A: Yes, I am retired.

Q: OK.

A: I have been on allowances for twenty years as an invalid. Because of my leg, you know.

Q: Yes.

A: I was shot in the knee when I was in the camp.

Q: You didn't tell us that you had been shot.

A: Didn't I?

Q: No.

A: Well, we might have been talking about that but I didn't tell you.

Q: No.

A: I was shot in my knee when I was in Lety.

Q: Under, under what circumstances?

A: Well, how to put it. It was like this, in the middle of the camp there was a patch of winter cabbage. And we, children were so hungry. We wouldn't take the whole head, just the bottom leaves. That was in the evening, we were crawling there, surreptitiously, on our knees. And each of us took one or two leaves and we stuffed the leaves into our shirts, on the naked body. And then we always ran back. But suddenly there was a light from the tower, from the reflectors. And they started shooting, shooting no matter what. They shot one boy dead and I got it in my leg. Someone took me away, I don't remember who that was.

Q: And who treated you?

A: Well.

Antonie Kroková

page 45

June 17, 1997

Q: That vet?

A: Someone big took me to the barrack, you know. That was in Lety.

Q: But who treated you afterwards? Did someone bandage it or something?

A: Well, that, the one.

Q: The vet you mentioned?

A: The one who bandaged horses and that kind of thing.

Q: Yes.

A: The one who treated them treated me, too.

Q: So we have learned something new here.

A: And then, after many years I went to work again, right, mainly to the cow shed after that pub. When I had children, one or two, I looked after cows. And I worked so that my children could live better than I did. Like I did then. So that they were fine. And, you know how this is, years are passing, one after another, and your health is going, too. Especially if you're used to working and then suddenly you cannot any more. And you still work harder than necessary.

Q: Well, you look like you still have plenty of energy.

A: Oh, well - - (laughter) - -

Q: Thank you very much.

***man's voice: I'm rolling.

Q: May I? Do you remember any of those kapos that were in charge of your blocks, or those **Blockälteste**, any of them in particular? Do you remember any of them, women too?

A: I cannot hear you.

Q: If you remember any particular women that were kapos or **Blockälteste** or officials in the camp.

A: Oh, right, hold on.

Q: Namely, if you remember anyone, and what they did, too. What was good they did and

Antonie Kroková

page 49

June 17, 1997

what was bad.

***man's voice: The lady asks you about names.

A: Mengele, Mengele, Mengele. Mengele. He was in Oświęcim, his name was Mengele and when the transports arrived, he told some people to go to the right and some to go to the left. According to their eyes or whatever. Those who went to the right lived for some time but those who went to the left were dead that day. Those who went to the left.

Q: Did you yourself ever go through such a selection? Did you go through that yourself?

A: Of course I did.

Q: Right.

A: That Mengele, when we were passing by in double-file, always two people. To the left, to the right. And there were lanes, one went this way and the other one that way. Those who went to the left were finished. And those who went to the right still had a chance that a half of them would remain alive.

Q: Yes.

A: Or perhaps some of them.

Q: That was right in the beginning, after you arrived there?

A: Yes.

Q: Right in the beginning.

A: That was in the beginning. And he was called Mengele.

Q: Yes. And as for the blocks you lived in afterwards, do you remember any names of the women who were in charge?

A: Do you believe that not?

Q: Not at all?

A: No, I only remember that one – Mengele. And my friend and me talked about him, that girlfriend of mine. She died then, poor girl. ___ I have a photo. So she talked about him with

Antonie Kroková

page 50

June 17, 1997

me, about all that. And she asked me: "Do you know his name?" And I say: "Well." So I tried to remember and said: "Yes, but I am not quite sure, was it Mengele?" "So you remember him correctly." But she didn't remember the others either. However, I remember that Mengele very well.

Q: You remember him, OK. That was a German, but I meant the inmates who were in charge there, the prisoners.

A: I understand but I don't remember. Not the names.

Q: No names, OK. And what about their behavior. I don't mean that you should say that some were polite and some weren't. Do you remember whether anyone helped anyone else, or on the contrary, whether those inmates did something bad to someone.

A: Well, I don't know how to put it. You know, that's almost impossible to say, describe.

Whether someone wanted to do something to you, kicked you, beat you and you tried to... You called for help and someone would help you. And then they either shot them or kicked them to death. Right. When you were going from work, completely exhausted and ill, and he would shout at you, three times, three times he would say: "Aufstehen!" That means "Get up, get up, get up!" and if you didn't get up after the third time because you weren't able to, you were so weak, then he would shoot you dead. And they kicked most people in the face, in the back, you know. The dead ones, too. They killed them, on the ground.

Q: Did that happen anywhere near you?

A: Yes, it did.

Q: It did.

A: It did, it did happen. It happened because we used to go from work with the adults, right.

That was always at the same time, we went from work all together. In groups, there were twenty, or fifteen people in the groups. And we among them. Children used to go last.

Because the adults were faster than us. So these things would happen.

Antonie Kroková

page 48

June 17, 1997

Q: So you did go to work, sometimes you did go to work, you didn't just carry the sand like you said.

A: Well, we were so tired that our arms were so weak that sometimes we weren't able to take a drink of water.

Q: No, I mean that you said that you went from work together with the adults.

A: Well, the hours, you know, let's say, at six p.m. we would wait for each other. One finished and then the other. And some, like us, were further away so we waited for one another and then went together.

Q: Yes.

A: To that, that camp we went.

Q: So you used to leave the camp, but you didn't really work, you just did those odd jobs.

A: No, well ____, because we were so weak.

Q: Yes.

A: Not much. We couldn't do any hard work. The poor guys did the digging, women were taking the dirt out, they had shovels, picks.

Q: Yes.

A: In the woods. Normally, in the woods, you know, they were making the ditches. Wide, so wide, when someone fell in them, they never came out.

Q: Did you ever see any transports arriving in your camp, did you see that from any of the barracks?

A: Well, I did.

Q: Yes.

A: We saw that, how they waited there with the dogs, you know, they waited there and nobody was allowed to move. Not a bit. One guy, he was neither old nor young, when there was a transport, he started running away. That was outside the gate, when they were going in. He started running away and they sent the dogs after him. So the dogs tore

Antonie Kroková

page 49

June 17, 1997

him apart. And then the same thing again, they made a stretcher, or they had it ready, they put him on the stretcher and carried him around the whole camp, outside, to all the blocks. And they shot him, too, see, they tore his shirt, more than necessary. That was the warning, so that others didn't even attempt such things.

Q: Yes.

A: That was, they were two.

***man's voice: Quiet.

Q: Mrs. Kroková, what you said about the women now, could you repeat that because the camera wasn't working.

A: OK, OK.

Q: You may start.

A: Now?

Q: Yeah.

A: So the kapos who beat women, not us, but women, they beat women. You didn't have to do anything, you didn't have to be guilty. They simply didn't like you or found another reason, I don't know. And sometimes, without any reason, no reason whatsoever, she would beat two or three of them, you know. And the women said: "Hold on, you beat us who cannot fight back? You will see, when we return home and find you, we will kill you!" and threatened them seriously. Those women, they were so mean that they did things a guy would never dare to do to a woman. But they had their orders so that they were allowed to do that, they didn't have to fear anything. So they did it.

Q: Do you know the origin of those female inmates? Were they German, Polish, do you remember? Those kapos?

A: Those kapos, right. There were Polish and Czech women, too.

Q: Czechs, too, right?

A: Yeah, Czechs too, and Polish women. What can I say? The one I recognized, as I told

Antonie Křoková

page 50

June 17, 1997

you, I don't know what his name is, no I don't know that. But I recognized him in the newspaper. And I was right, I did recognize him. It was the one, I told you about him, he always took me on his lap and stroked me. And he was in Prague. He was allocating allowances for those of us who had been in concentration camps, special allowances. When he approved of the person he gave it to them. And when he didn't, he crossed them out. He had all the say. And I, as I recognized him, I was awarded a medal, an honorable mention, I have it here.

Q: Was he a German?

A: Yes, a German.

Q: And they let him work here after the war?

A: Yes, after the war. Hold on, I will tell you exactly, in which year that was. Hold on... In about 1969, if I am not mistaken. In about 1969. I have the ID cards here, it'll be written there. If there is the year when I reported him.

Q: So you reported him afterwards.

A: Give me that envelope, I will take it out. - It isn't just under the sweater, shake it a bit. ____ OK, give it, _____. I know where it is. _____. Hang on, there are some, give it to me. Oh yes, here we are. I am waiting for that one but not, that's not the one, this is the one.

Q: Well that's the **Svaz protifašistických bojovníků**. That's from 1988.

A: Oh, well, I said 1968, didn't I? I made a mistake.

Q: So you recognized him in a photo and testified against him, didn't you?

A: They hanged him.

Q: I see.

A: I told them that he got too little. I have a **resistance movement card (odbojářskéj průkaz)**.

Q: Yes.

A: I told him that they should have waited for me and that friend of mine. And he, they

Antonie Kroková

page 51

June 17, 1997

laughed and asked: "Why?" And I said: "I would have really let him have it." They hanged him and what? I would have had him tortured, like they tortured us. I would have given him harder punishment. Knocked, knocked his teeth out and other things. They did that to other people. They shot and kicked people in front of us. They shaved their head and then bashed them over the head. Or stomped on their head and you could see the brain coming out, or the head smashed completely. And they just hanged him and I only got this, for all that.

Q: How, you were just...

A: Well.

Q: ...a small girl back then. Were you ever in a desperate situation in the camp when you didn't know what to do and you thought that you wouldn't survive that? __were you?

A: Of course I was. It was exactly like that.

Q: Was it often like that?

A: Yes, you couldn't...

Q: Were you afraid that you wouldn't survive the war?

A: It was worse than horrible there, worse than horrible, how could I, horrible, even worse.

Q: Did it happen that someone would be so desperate that they would take their own life, ran into those wires for instance, in order to kill themselves?

A: So you think that when one was sensible then, well, had I been sensible back then, I wouldn't have survived that. I would have done the same. Why should I be suffering for so many years, I'd rather have ended my life to finish it all.

Q: Did that happen anywhere around you?

A: Oh yeah, one guy hanged himself on his own shirt. The shirt with sleeves, hung it from the grille and hanged himself. Not just once.

Q: Yes. Did that happen in your block or you just heard about that?

A: In the block where I stayed, ____the next door. And next door, one guy hanged himself

Antonie Kroková

page 52

June 17, 1997

and another one slit his wrists and did that. It was like that.

Q: Yes. But you were only women in that camp, weren't you? Did you have an opportunity to see men?

A: How?

Q: Whether you had a chance to meet any men there?

A: Right. No, we didn't.

Q: No.

A: No.

Q: There were only women in the camp, weren't there?

A: Yes, only women. And those were, simply, only women. And in Oświęcim...

Q: Yes.

A: There were all together. Mixed.

Q: Women and men together?

A: Women and men together?

Q: In one camp?

A: Yes, yes, yes. Yes, all together. When you were legally married, you slept together on one bed.

Q: Was it like that when you arrived there?

A: When I was there, yes. During my time there it was like that. But many children froze to death, old people froze, you only had one blanket underneath and one on top. But the blankets were, I don't know, you may not know or remember what they looked like. They were scratchy, like for horses. And they had heaps of those blankets. And you had one on top, but there weren't just one or two people sleeping underneath it. There were, they were called boxes those beds.

Q: Yes.

A: There were ten or fifteen children on one. On those beds. Old people, too, you could only

Antonie Křoková

page 53

June 17, 1997

see the heads.

Q: Yes.

A: Packed like sardines in a room.

Q: There were men and women in the same barrack, right?

A: Yes.

Q: Provided they were married.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: They could live together and ____.

A: They were together. They were together and he would work somewhere and women had some other work. And when the woman was strong, young for instance, she would go to work with the men, to dig the ditches.

Q: And that came to an end?

A: Yes, that came to an end.

Q: Right.

A: That was the end.

Q: And then, in all the other camps you were only in women's camps.

A: Yes, then I was only in the Czech camp.

Q: Right.

A: Yes.

Q: Before you went to Ravensbrück, did you go through, did you pass an examination. Did they select some of the women or you went all from your block?

A: Depending on the kind of transport, you know. There were transports to two camps, for instance, and they would select a whole truck or a car. And then there were two trucks or a full car, depending on the camp where you were going.

Q: Did they sort you out beforehand?

A: Yes.

Antonie Kroková

page 54

June 17, 1997

Q: Do you know the word "selection"? Did you go through a selection? The one that Mengele did?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did he say, to the right?

A: Yes.

Q: And to the left, that was a selection.

A: Right.

Q: So you said that after you arrived in the camp you went through that.

A: Yes, I did.

Q: And then, in the camp again, after you had been there for a longer period of time, did that happen again?

A: Not there.

Q: No.

A: No no no no. Not there. That was only once, in Oświęcim.

Q: Yes.

A: But otherwise not. Otherwise, there were men in one dormitory or whatever it is called, and women and girls, and boys and men. They all had their own dormitories. But we were together in one camp. Everyone walked around there. But in the evenings we were separate.

Q: Yes. I meant selections that would happen when they were taking women to other camps, first they had them walk around the blocks naked and chose the stronger ones that were sent to work then. You didn't experience anything like that, did you? You understand what I mean, don't you?

A: Of course I do, very well, I remember. I understood you, I did.

Q: You don't remember, do you, otherwise you would certainly remember this.

A: No, I don't remember that. I don't remember that, but after the war they talked about it.

Antonie Kroková

page 55

June 17, 1997

Q: Yes.

A: This.

Q: Yes.

A: They talked about that. But I don't remember.

Q: Did you ever hear the word "**Muselmann**" in the camp? "**Muselmann**," that was the totally weak people.

A: Oh yes, **Muselmann**, yes, I understand that. Yes.

Q: Were people in such condition in your camp, too?

A: I know, there was a really poor guy there, he couldn't go on. There were many people like that.

Q: Right.

A: Very many of those "**Muselmans**," that's true. They were alive and dead at the same time.

Q: Yes.

A: They were called **Muselmann** in German. You speak German too, don't you? The Germans called them **Muselmann**.

Q: Yes, yes.

A: That is **recht**, meaning right.

Q: I don't know what else to ask, perhaps that gentleman will ask you, I don't have any more questions.

***man's voice: The camera's rolling.

***man's voice: Yup.

A: OK.

Q: Well, I would like to know, Mrs. Kroková, about how you went to the first camp.

A: To Lety.

Q: Yes, to Lety. How was that, who came for you? Who and where did they come for you?

Antonie Křoková

page 56

June 17, 1997

A: Those were Czech cops, they came for us in Beroun. And from Beroun we were taken to, on the trucks, right. We went by train, on a truck, there were trucks. And they took us to Lety.

Q: How many were you? Your family.

A: All our family. We were eight children, then mum, dad and others from Beroun, the truck was full.

Q: Were there any Romanies besides you?

A: No, there weren't.

Q: Not at all?

A: No.

Q: And what happened when you arrived in Lety?

A: In Lety? They brought us there by that truck.

Q: And how did it all happen when went there?

A: Well, OK. Before, before the Czech cops came for us, they photographed us. Three times, the front view, the profile and from behind.

Q: That was still in Beroun?

A: Yes, exactly. That was in Beroun. I am telling you what happened first. They took us to Lety on that truck. We arrived there and they put us in the block, block number eight. They put us there. So we were there, came in and they examined our heads. Those who had lice had their heads shaven and those who didn't had their hair cut very short, like this. And then we were supposed to take a bath, a cold bath, there was no hot water. Well, and then, we were told to bring some wood from the forest..., the brushwood they put on the dead.

Q: I would like to ask you one more thing.

A: Yes.

Q: Before we come to the work you did, did they tell you why they were taking you to Lety?

Antonie Křoková

page 57

June 17, 1997

A: Well, it was like this, we knew why we were going there. My dad was a partisan, and they found the flyers in the loft. The flyers.

Q: The flyers.

A: They found them there. And they found walkie-talkies, too, there were many more men involved, not just my father. So they took us there. And they photographed us, too. They wouldn't have taken us and mum, but mum, when she saw that dad was being taken somewhere, she didn't know what would happen. So she said that since they were taking the father, they should take her as mother and the children, too. So they took photos of us and put us on a truck.

Q: What were you allowed to take to Lety?

A: Nothing, we couldn't take anything. We went just like we were. There was nothing, we couldn't take anything. Everyone was allowed to take 0.25 kilograms, no, twenty five. Twenty five kilos. That was nothing, though. And those who put more in their bags, those were not allowed to bring that. So finally nobody had anything and we went just in the clothes we were wearing. They took us to the camp on that truck and they divided us according to the blocks. And the work? Groundwork for adults and for us, children, gathering brushwood for the pyres they were making for the dead. Like this, they put the wood on it and poured something over it.

Q: Where did they build the pyres?

A: Well, outside the camp where nothing would catch on fire. In a field so that nothing would burn there. On the ground. And when they didn't die there, they beat them to death. And they were making the ditches and when they couldn't go on, I am repeating this, I really don't like this, they shot them dead or beat them to death. That was it.

Q: Could you stay with this for a bit? Did you personally ever see something like that to happen?

A: Of course I did. How could I not see it? When we collected the wood and put it on the

Antonie Kroková

page 58

June 17, 1997

heap, the guys were taking that with the pitchforks and threw it on the fire where the dead were. And poured something over it. And some could not carry on or were simply ill, they had fever, they couldn't work any more, they fell over for instance. And when the others helped them, that was in all the camps, when others helped him, they all got shot. Or they would stomp on them.

Q: I would like to hear a particular story from Lety, whether you saw this happen to someone you knew.

A: Someone I knew.

Q: Or people that you used to see there that would get beaten to death.

A: Oh yes, they shot two sisters of mine and my father dead.

Q: And how did that happen? Why did they shoot them?

A: Because the sisters were raped and my dad was running to help them.

Q: How did that happen?

A: Normally, the Czechs. The Czech cops, or how you say that...

Q: Would you remember their names?

A: Well, the thing is that not. But that Hejduk, I think that it was him. He would do such things, that Josef Hejduk. We had information that he was doing such things there. So I could say that it was him.

Q: Were you with your sisters when it happened?

A: We were all there, my brothers, sisters and mum. But mum was not there any more, she had been, with some sisters and brothers, taken to Oświęcim.

Q: Could you try to retell the story, what happened to your sisters? That's a very important moment.

A: Well.

Q: Could you remember and tell us about the whole incident, how it happened. From the beginning, where the sisters were going and what happened, whether someone attacked

Antonie Křoková

page 59

June 17, 1997

or how it was?

A: Well, it was like this. It was in the afternoon, late afternoon. That was in the late afternoon and we were free in the camp. We could run around within the camp. And my sisters were with us. Most of them were older, eighteen, nineteen years old. They kept chatting about stuff. They stuck together, poor girls, because mum wasn't alive then any more. And we, the younger ones were together, too. Well, and that - -(cough)- -, and that guy, the two cops were standing there and the other two aside. And one came up to them and chatted with them. - -(cough)- -

Q. Would you like a drink?

A: One came up to them and chatted with them. And we watched the one who chatted with them, right. He was looking at my sister and suddenly he grabbed her and she ___ him, she pushed him away. And then the other guy, my sisters were defending one another. And then the third came there and pulled them apart. He was a strong guy, you cannot beat a guy. It was not allowed there anyway. So he slapped her a couple of times, and the other one, too and threw her on the ground. And they were trying to keep us away, we were crying and they were forcing us back. And we were running to tell that they got some girls, saying their names. So our dad ran that way, he caught one of them. And the other saw that and shot him dead. My brother ran there, too, he was fourteen then and he got shot, too. So they shot all four of them dead. They were dead. All four.

Q: The sisters, too?

A: Yes, exactly. First the sisters. He shot the sisters first and the other one shot our dad.

Q: And you watched the whole thing?

A: And my brother, the fourteen-year-old ran there, too. And he got shot as well.

Q: And what happened then?

A: Well, nothing happened then. They dragged them away and that was it. We had to keep quiet. We weren't allowed to cry either. Because they kept threatening us that they would

Antonie Kroková

page 60

June 17, 1997

shoot us too, so we couldn't even cry. We had to keep quiet.

Q: And, Mrs. Kroková, what about when someone died there? How were those people, did you see how they burned them? Did it happen that they would be put into a hole and buried? Did you see that?

A: Well, of course. They were making the holes, when they couldn't burn them all, they put them into the holes. Those were two meters deep or so, and the people were thrown in and covered with dirt and other people were put on top again.

Q: Did that happen at one particular place?

A: Well, all over the woods. All the way down the woods. The holes were two meters deep and two meters wide. And when someone was running away, they couldn't jump over the hole. So they fell into the hole. And the dogs tore them apart. It was the same in Oświęcim, too.

Q: Did you see that in Lety, too?

A: We saw the same thing in Lety, too. With our own eyes, because we were there. You couldn't go anywhere. So you were there and saw that like you see me now and I see you.

Q: You said you had been wounded in Lety, they shot you in your leg. That's quite a serious injury, how were you treated afterwards? Were you allowed to stay in bed and not work? How was that?

A: Well, they admitted that I couldn't walk then. We were treated by vets, that treat cows and horses, those were the doctors there, there were two of them.

Q: And what were their names?

A: I don't know, I don't know, really.

Q: Were those also prisoners?

A: Yes, they were prisoners as well, of course they were.

Q: The doctors.

Antonie Křoková

page 61

June 17, 1997

A: Yes, those were inmates.

Q: And how did they treat you?

A: Well, they were in the infirmary, where they didn't have anything. And when someone was ill, they didn't get anything. Only when they were bleeding, they bandaged it and that was it.

Q: And how long were you allowed to stay in bed after that incident when you got shot in the leg?

A: Well, I did stay in bed. Yes. They let me stay there in the infirmary for about two days and then I went back to our barrack.

Q: The one where you stayed before.

A: Yes.

Q: Where you stayed.

A: They put me back there and those who were called kapos, they brought me something and looked at it, and then took me back to the infirmary, they bandaged it and took me back again.

Q: Did that injury heal while you were still in Lety?

A: Well, it almost healed in Lety. But after some time it came back, I had to be operated on my knee.

Q: After the war?

A: After the war. Now I am handicapped because of the knee, the leg is all crooked. And my hip joint got broken, too, therefore I walk with the crutch.

Q: You spoke about the kapos in Lety. What were they like, those kapos, were they women? How did they treat you?

A: Well, it was like this. They weren't bad to children. When children obeyed them, they were fine. But with women, when they were, let's say, if I were mad at you and I knew that I can thrash you, that nothing would happen to me, because the cops would say: "If you don't

Antonie Kroková

page 62

June 17, 1997

like some of them, beat them, that's fine." So they beat them. And those who were not used to working, who weren't skilled, they paid for that. Those who weren't used to it and couldn't work with shovels or picks got beaten a lot. Even five times a day. They were beaten while they were going home.

Q: And the women who were kapos, those were inmates, too? Where were they from, for instance?

A: I wish I knew where they were from.

Q: You didn't know their names, did you?

A: No, of course not.

Q: Did they have a better position in the camp? Did those cops treat them better than you? Did they get more food?

A: No, not really, that was about the same. When a child was born there, in Lety, it lived for two or three days and that was it. They didn't survive.

Q: Do you know how children were delivered there? Did anyone assist the women during the delivery, did they go to the infirmary?

A: Well, there were women who were older, right. So the women would help other women. But even if the child was healthy and strong and pretty, it only lived for two or three days. They weren't allowed to breast-feed them so that they wouldn't reproduce. They said they had their own milk. And they put some drugs into the milk and then baby would drink that and the next day it was dead.

Q: How did you hear that women were not allowed to breast-feed their own children?

A: Well, because they said that and they were there with us. They were there and they cried: "I cannot breast-feed my own child."

***man's voice: Stop it for a sec, right.

A: And they...

***man's voice: I'm rolling, you may start.

Antonie Kroková

page 63

June 17, 1997

Q: Let's get back to those women. How did you hear that they were not allowed to breast-feed their children?

A: OK. They said that to each other. And we, as children saw that the women who had babies cried. We wondered why they cried. And we heard that the children were taken from them and they were not allowed to breast-feed them. And the next day we heard that the baby was dead. They took them and threw them into a hole and that was it. There were no little graves.

Q: None of the women was allowed to keep the child? None of them had the baby with her?

A: Some did but as I say, they didn't survive. And even those who were nine, ten months old, or even two or three years old, they didn't last long. They gave them sour milk and the drugs. I don't know what drugs those were. They simply drank it. And then they got diarrhea, they got sick and didn't survive anyway.

Q: Did the women talk about the drugs that were put in the milk for the children?

A: Well, that was a clear thing, the kapos brought them the milk. The kapos poured it in the bottles and put the rubber nipple on it and gave that to the mothers and they didn't want to give it to the children. But the kapos were standing there and watched so that no-one could breast-feed, that was not allowed, not even a little. I am telling you, they weren't allowed to.

Q: The women must have had some health problems with the milk that remained in the breasts, or not?

A: Oh well, they didn't mind. They didn't have any troubles, that had nothing to do with that.

Q: Do you remember whether any women had health problems after the delivery, whether they were ill sometimes?

A: Well, the mothers, that's clear that it is very much the same as at home. When they don't breast-feed and they have more milk after the delivery, the breasts become painful, they might have been ill then. And they had to go to work with that. And then they took the child

Antonie Kroková

page 64

June 17, 1997

away after one or two days and she had no child then. And it was the same with the older ones, they gave them that milk.

Q: Did the women around you survive that?

A: Excuse me?

Q: Whether the women survived all that heartache? Do you remember the women around you?

A: Well, most of them survived. They were ill or had to go to work right after the childbirth.

When women had to go work immediately afterwards, they sometimes died, they didn't survive that.

Q: Did that happen to any of your acquaintances?

A: Well, acquaintances, there was my relative, my cousin, there. A daughter of my mother's sister, a cousin. And she had twins, and then neither of them lived and after three months she died, too, poor woman, the babies died and shortly she died as well. She had to go to work, so she didn't survive that. None of them did.

Q: So she had to go to work while still recovering from childbirth?

A: She had to go to work, yes.

Q: And what food did you get there as children?

A: What food we had there? Mainly it was potatoes, picked in the Autumn, all those, what do you call them, prisoners, those who lived in the camp, went to the field, men, women together with the commanders. They picked potatoes. Some potatoes were soft, a bit sweetish, frozen. And they cooked them for us. They gave that to everyone.

Q: Did children eat the same as adults?

A: Yes. We only had a different kind of bread, but other food was the same. Sometimes they made oatmeal on Sundays, they cooked it just in water. You know what oatmeal is, don't you? So they cooked that in water. And they gave it to us, unsalted.

Antonie Křoková

page 65

June 17, 1997

Q: Did you get any special portions at Christmas or other holidays?

A: --(laughter)-- It was all the same, Christmases or weekdays. There was no Christmas.

We had nothing there. When we just heard that, when we understood, then we cried.

Others celebrated, not the kapos, no, but the commanders and those who weren't from the camp, they feasted and sang and drank. It is clear that we felt sorry, even the older people, that we had nothing.

End of tape 2.

Tape 3.

A: I sometimes, excuse me, just one ___.

***man's voice: I am rolling, you may start.

Q: Could you please finish what you were saying about Christmas? What did the gendarmes do there?

A: They had a good Christmas there. For instance, at Christmas they...

***man's voice: Sorry, stop, yes.

***man's voice: Me too, let's start.

Q: So once more.

A: The Christmas. What else can I say about Christmas. The adult women would just always say: "We know when it is Christmas and they are drunk and having fun. And they are singing and they have everything and we don't have even a piece of bread." So it is clear that Christmas is on the 24th, everyone knew that. It was more peaceful then, and the illnesses and all the heartache, they didn't torture anyone then. They needed the time for themselves, they were happy and all that. And when they threw a piece of bread crust into the dustbin, there were dustbins, we knew that there were the dustbins, and so we, children went there after Christmas and searched there. When we found a bit of something, we blew on it to get the dirt off and ate it right away and put it into our shirts, too. Oh, it was like that.

Antonie Křoková

page 66

June 17, 1997

Q: Could you remember whether someone was punished differently than you, than by being beaten or being shot like you, in the leg? Was anyone else punished there, and how?

A: Punished. As far as I can remember, I can tell you honestly that when they were punished they didn't live any more. They took them down to the basement and tied them there. And they took them down there and thrashed them and tortured them until they killed them. So the people were dead, that was the punishment.

Q: How did you hear that they were punishing the people in the basement?

A: Well, that was a public thing, that was no secret, really, no secret. They built a little house, a brick-built house and there was a little window and grilles on it. Strong bars. An iron gate, right, and when someone did something, I don't know how to put it, when someone did something that they didn't want to kill them for, they made them suffer there. They put them there, and gave them just water, one day water, and a piece of bread every other day, or every two days. Or even no water at all, just dry bread once and then water the other day. And they beat them, too. There was one person, or sometimes two or three, poor guys. And when we were outside for the counting, they looked outside through the grille and we only saw the eyes and part of their heads. And when the cop went there, he beat them so that they cried, poor guys. And sometimes he beat them to death. So that was the punishment, harder than necessary. And some people were taken to the basement and thrashed.

Q: Did you see any of those people who were locked in that little house that they would come out, alive? Or no-one ever came out?

A: No, nobody came out. I can only tell you that my uncle came, as the only one. And he went around the whole camp and said: "Children, they had such and such thing there." They were trying to kill him, to murder him. They wanted to murder him. But, I don't know how, he managed to find excuses or whatnot. He was really smart, that uncle of mine, well I don't know how he managed to get out, what excuses he made up. So they told him that

Antonie Křoková

page 67

June 17, 1997

if someone hears about what they wanted to do to him that they would take him and kill him. That they wouldn't let him out. And he told people in our family and those he was sure who wouldn't report to them. People were afraid to do such things or to escape or confront the cops. Nobody would dare to do that.

Q: What was your uncle's name?

A: My uncle? My uncle was called Tříska.

Q: Why was he there? What were the prisoners punished for like that?

A: Well, for instance when they confronted someone. Or when they escaped, or the kapos were beating someone without any reason and they wouldn't fight back, just pushed them away, that was enough. Saying more than necessary. They punished women and they punished men in the same way. The kapos were inmates, too, so they did whatever they wanted with the people. Even many women said about two women-kapos: "You are giving us a hard time but when we return home, if we survive this and see you somewhere, that'll be your last day. We will kill you, we won't let you live."

Q: Did you see any of those women-kapos after the war?

A: No, not me.

Q: And could you remember any of the Czech gendarmes, who was the worst one?

A: Nobody but for the... that Josef Hejduk, I remember him, he was so mean but otherwise I don't remember. We saw it all, all who were there, me too, I saw it with my own eyes, as you say, but I don't know any names. Only that one.

Q: Were there any nice gendarmes that tried to help you?

A: No, they didn't help but they may not thrash us, or when something happened they said: "Go there." Or: "Go there." Or: "Hide in there." Or: "Don't do that." And so on. Some were like that, but not many.

Q: Could you remember any names?

A: No, not really. It's a shame, but I was, I was eight back then. Anyway. And all the illnesses

Antonie Kroková

page 68

June 17, 1997

I had.

Q: You said that some members of your family remained free. Did they come to visit you in Lety?

A: To what?

Q: Whether your family that was not imprisoned in Lety came to visit you in the camp?

A: I don't know, as far as I can remember, no-one ever came.

Q: And did you get any letters or parcels?

A: Nothing. Nothing like that.

Q: Not in Lety.

A: No no no no no. Nothing there. There was nothing. We were there for a particular time and a then message came that our family should be released from Lety. But there was no family any more. Dad was away, the oldest daughters were away, too, and my brother as well. Mum with some siblings was in Oświęcim. And we, well, that one was not alive anymore either. And we wanted to follow our mother, we were children. Where could we go as children? So they sent us to Oświęcim.

Q: Were you there when they were taking your mother from Lety to Oświęcim or made the decision that she would go to Oświęcim?

A: Well, it was spoken about and then they put us in another block, all the barracks were marked, there were numbers on them. They separated us from our mother, our parent, put us in another block. The sisters who were fifteen, seventeen, they were not alive anymore then. One brother and father died in Lety. And I never saw those who went to Oświęcim, never.

Q: Did someone come to the camp to select the people who would then go to transports Oświęcim?

A: Yes.

Q: And who was that? How did that selection happen?

Antonie Kroková

page 69

June 17, 1997

A: Well, it was more simple, there were the cops that were in the camp.

Q: Those were Czech cops?

A: Yes.

Q: Did they choose the people?

A: They did, they chose the people, they could do anything.

Q: According to what criteria did they select the people who would stay and those who would go?

A: There were no criteria, like whether the people were Czechs or Jews. If the majority of the family were in Oświęcim already, they didn't take any more families, they sent the remaining children to their mother. Or both parents.

Q: How come they sent your mother and sisters there earlier than you?

A: Because they were going to work. They were sent there to work. And then the transports were calculated and they went there to work. It was supposed that there would be work in Oświęcim. There were jobs, when we children came there, I saw myself that the work was about the same like here in Lety.

Q: Where was it worse? In Lety or in Oświęcim?

A: It was worse in Oświęcim. They beat people to death there, and here too, it's hard to compare. But here were Czech cops and there were Germans.

Q: And the last question. You said that after the war you were afraid of being sent to another camp.

A: Yes.

Q: For what reason? Were there such camps?

A: For what reason, well I was not that smart then, when I think about it now, I realize that I was not too smart and I was still afraid that they would send me back there if I don't work. And then I was three years older than in the camp and I figured that if I don't work I would be sent to a camp again. I wouldn't have been sent there, but I didn't want to be

Antonie Křoková

page 70

June 17, 1997

unemployed, I was afraid back then. So I kept looking for work. I swept in that pub, scrubbed the stairs, cleaned, and then I learned to scrub vegetables, to clean and chop them. And after a year I was helping the women with cooking. And when I was in Beroun then, I was there for about three years, and then I did the all cooking, I mean with the other women, not alone.

Q: So you went back to Beroun after the war, didn't you?

A: Yes.

Q: Where...

A: With that ____.

Q: ...did you live before? Was there still your house and all the furnishing? What did you say you left there? Did you find the things again?

A: No, I didn't find anything, because we lived by the river. And the house we had wasn't too big. Later we had the circus there. And everything was taken by the water. Everything went with the water, I was just staring at the flood, the water was everywhere. And I told him: "Look, you see, _____ in Beroun." I said: "Like that, you see." It was the same, taking the houses, everything, everything that was there. Well, and when I came back I recognized that. And women told me, those people who were there and saw it, and the hotel owner told me: "Had you been there, then you may not be alive anymore. The water might have taken you." There was a flood.

Q: What was the name of the circus that your father owned?

A: Aleš.

Q: Aleš.

A: Yes, that was world class.

Q: So thank you very much.

A: That was a world-famous name, that circus. A big circus.

Q: OK.

Antonie Křoková

page 71

June 17, 1997

End of tape 3.

Conclusion of interview.