

Three marker.

Sorry. That made it worse.

Hold on a second.

Four marker.

So you thought you remembered something about the Germans.

Yes, at the very last I think they couldn't find they couldn't get their final count of 500. They must have barged into homes and dragged some able-bodied, young Jewish men out of their homes and added them to the rest of the group.

And so you had a bad feeling when they left, and then how did you figure out what happened?

I was still optimistic when they left. And when the truth finally came out, it was just total disbelief. Such deception.

And then--

Yeah, when I found out that they had been killed, I think they were killed at one of the fortresses. I forget which one.

How did you find that out? Did it just come in--

Well, the news just spread like wildfire throughout the ghetto. Neighbors huddled together and counted the losses. Many of our family friends were in that group.

The best-- the best minds were taken out of the ghetto. The best minds who might have been able to provide leadership, they were no longer there.

And then not long after that, near the end of October, was the big action. Can you tell me how that happened?

Yes. It was the last Tuesday in the month of October, 1941. Again, posters must have been nailed to public buildings, and verbal commands had gone out that on the morning of Tuesday-- I forgot the date-- October. Maybe it was the 28th. Was it? Every person-- every Jewish person in the ghetto-- had to report at-- it may have been 6 o'clock in the morning. Very, very early-- at the public square, which was called Democracy Square.

Everybody was able to walk, regardless of age. The houses had to be left-- the doors had to be left open. Everybody who was found in the home would be executed. Executed on the spot. And ostensibly, this was done for the taking of a census. And it didn't look good.

In our case, my mother could barely walk. But I do remember that the house where we were living was very close to the square, so we had a very short distance to walk. We may have had a 5- or 10-minute walk at the most. And we had planned to leave our house around 5:30.

Well, around 4:00 on that morning, I could hear footsteps, never-ending footsteps. It was still-- there was still total darkness. It was a cold, damp, foggy, kind of late fall, early winter day. There may have been some snow on the ground. There may have been some wet snow falling. And the three of us, my mother, father, and I, started getting ready for our trip down the steps and out the door.

Before we did that, I dabbed some lipstick on my mother's cheeks to make her look a little more healthy. We dressed warmly and just started out towards the square. My father was supporting my mother on one side. I was supporting her on the other side. And we slowly walked-- joined the rest of the gray mass that was walking in front of us, and made it to the square.

At the square there was total chaos. Family units didn't know where to stand. Everybody, of course at that point, already had a work pass and was affiliated with a work group.

My father was-- as head of the family-- we joined his work outfit, and he was working at the military airport doing just manual labor, construction work, digging, hauling rocks, that sort of thing. So we looked for the larger contingent of airfield workers, and we stood with them, and stood and waited.

As we were waiting-- and at that point I think there were about 28,000 Jews in the ghetto, so all of them, or most of them, were assembled on the square.

And so we noticed that several German officers-- I don't know what unit they belonged to, whether they were SS or some other unit. I suspect they were members of the SS. And one of them was greatly feared. His name was Rauca, R-A-U-C-A.

And he was-- I had never seen him before, but he was pointed out to me. And I think he was standing behind some sort of table, and there may have been a chair, and there were some papers on that table.

And he was not alone. There were other Germans with him. I don't know whether there were dogs or not. I don't remember that, but they all had their pistols in their holster and possibly whips.

Well, as soon as family units had found their were groups, there was a little more order in the square. And I remember that we were still standing around noon. Nothing had-- nobody had moved from our group. Nobody had passed in review before Rauca, but we could see what he was doing.

He was assigning family units to the left and to the right, and already it was very obvious that the people who had been assigned to the right were the healthy and the able-bodied and the younger looking ones. And certainly no children among that group.

And the families with children, perhaps their elderly parents or older people or sick people had been motioned to the left. And the three of us were just standing there, cold, stunned--

Mark 15. Marker 5.

So you and your parents were standing there, waiting and petrified. That's where we're picking up.

Perhaps I should not say that the able-bodied were assigned to the right side because there are times when I'm not sure as to which the good side was, but what was happening before our eyes was the human tragedy that was unfolding. Families that were torn apart, were-- perhaps the elderly parents were separated from their younger adult children, or sometimes even the mothers with children were separated from their husbands. And the crying and the despair, it was-- it was just devastating.

Of course our worry was how to get by, get past the inspection table. How would we get my mother through? I don't know if it was the hand of God, but we passed the table and Rauca must have-- perhaps was looking the other way.

I know at one time he was eating his sandwich for lunch, and calmly eating his sandwich, holding it in one hand, and with the other hand directing people to life or to death. And it may have been that during one of those moments while he was not looking, the three of us were able to slip past the reviewing stand.

And once we were on the other side, we were so relieved. We knew it wasn't over yet, but at least we had reached a safety point, a safe haven for whatever period would be allotted to us.

And how did you find out what happened to the people who went to the bad side?

Probably the next day. They were all taken. Let me also add that 10,000 people were taken away on that day. They were led away, and-- pardon me for backtracking, but we came home, we had to take account who was still in the house and who had been taken away. So in our house everybody except the old pharmacist and his wife returned.

We went back to the square the next morning and found Mr. [? Mesahovich ?] slumped over on a camp stool, which his wife had brought along for him to rest, because she knew it was going to be a long day for him. He must have suffered a heart attack, and he was just left behind slumped over. His wife must have been led away.

Shall I confess at this point that the two of them had tried to remain close to us and form a family unit with us? And that I certainly was trying to get away from them because I knew that our chances-- our chances were slim to begin with, and I was afraid that if there was an elderly couple with us our chances would be even slimmer.

So they did not return. Instead we found an old woman whom nobody knew. She was sitting in a chair in the kitchen when we came back, exhausted of course. Completely drained of all emotion. And we asked her-- and the Jewish word for old woman is [? alt-- ?] or we called her [? [YIDDISH] ?] little old woman. What are you doing here? Where did you come from?

And she said she just got too tired walking to the square, she was all by herself, so she walked into the first open door and waited.

OK. And within a few days everyone in the ghetto knew what had happened?

Yes. I'm sure we heard the shooting coming from the Ninth Fort. And oh, at first there were all sorts of rumors that the people who had been separated from the rest would be assigned new workplaces outside of the ghetto, but at that point nobody believed these rumors. And then we could hear the shooting. And we had the proof that they were gone.

And then gradually life became--

Yes. Life returned to ghetto normalcy. Let me see what happened to us after that. I was assigned a work place, so I had a work card. And I can tell you about that.

Tell me about your work.

Because I was very fortunate in getting this assignment. It was in a greenhouse. I worked in a greenhouse along with perhaps a small group of 20 people. And there were several pluses to this work site.

First, it was inside the ghetto. I didn't have far to walk. I didn't have to walk one or two hours every day to the airfield, as most other people did, who were doing really backbreaking labor there. I just had this short walk to the nursery where we grew out-of-season vegetables for the SS hierarchy.

And the best part of all, we had a Jewish supervisor, horticulturist by the name of Mr [? Kapit. ?] He was the brother of a former math professor. A very decent man. We still had to do our work, but it certainly was not backbreaking.

We planted seedlings and transport-- I mean, we planted seeds, transplanted the seedlings, and grew them to the point where we could harvest all sorts of vegetables, cucumbers, radishes, carrots, asparagus, green onions.

We not allowed to take anything home. It was a great treat to be allowed to take a few tips of green onion home and have it with our microscopic ration of bread. It was a great treat. And like I said, the Jewish supervisor was certainly the exact opposite of a German guard who could have hovered over us with a gun or threats or taunts.

Who was the food for?

It was grown exclusively for the use of German officers. Is that what you asked me?

Did you smuggle?

I personally never got involved in smuggle, but as far as the producer was concerned, no. Nothing was taken out. It would have been too dangerous to endanger the other people in the group, as well as our good--