

Mark three, marker.

Tell me a little more about that commander. Did he like you?

He probably did because one day he came-- and he went into the ghetto, and whatever he liked, whatever he saw, he took. One day, he comes. He says, you know, today I brought a present for Miriam. And what did he bring me? A yellow star, what we had to wear, but it was done by an artist. It was really beautifully done on the wire ring and with yellow-- actually, it was gold in the middle of the star, and it was really very pretty.

He brought it to me with a pin to put on. Also, his valet was very good to me. First of all, I had to eat myself there, and he always sat and ate with me together. And in the evening, he made sure that I always brought something home for the family to eat. And at the time, that was a big, big thing, and I can tell you we should really have so many good years still, how my mother divided the food among some friends or some neighbors and my aunt and my cousin for sure, but there were a few neighbors.

And my dad, at that time, worked on the airport, and my mother always made sure that he has an extra sandwich, if he worked with somebody, that he shouldn't see that he is eating well and the other one not because, first of all, there were no refrigeration where you can keep it. And second, we always knew that tomorrow I'll bring, again, something. So that was a big help for us.

And did he one time tell you that he would like to shoot you? And what did he mean?

No, that was his valet. He said to me one day-- he said, you know, Miriam, I would like to shoot you. And I said, why? What did I do to you? And I see that we are quite friendly among ourselves. He said, well, I don't want you to suffer. I'll hit you right in the heart.

Tell me-- can we cut for just a second?

Marker, four marker.

Miriam, can you tell me what the workshops were in the ghetto? I don't know about a ghetto. I didn't know about the workshops.

Oh, sure. And that was a very good thing because a big hunk of the population were occupied with that. They had all different departments. There was a shoe department, what made the boots for the Germans. There was a laundry, where they brought their clothes. They even made toys for-- what they probably sent back to Germany. And a lot of people were occupied, and it was good for the people to work because if you didn't work and they had the selection, the first ones who always were selected were the ones who didn't have a job. And not everybody could go out of the ghetto to work places. There were not so many demands.

So in fact, later on, when I got married and-- the commanders-- they all changed. They didn't stay too long. A different group took over. I also worked in the Werkstätten. I worked in the toy department. We made toys from wood and stuffed dolls, like rag dolls.

Can you just tell me what day-to-day life was like in the ghetto after the great action, in that period when the ghetto just sort of operated as a ghetto?

Well, daily life was, like I said before, you got up in the morning, you went to work, and you came back. And you were glad to come back. More or less, the Jews were very inventive. They took the fences, and they had some wood for the winter. And we also had our own clothes at that time, and they took those clothes along to the workplaces out of the ghetto. And they exchanged it.

The Lithuanian people used to come with butter, and margarine, and potatoes, sometimes even some meat, and they

exchanged it, flour. And then they brought it back. So we had a little more to eat than later on when we went to the concentration camps. But otherwise, we even had-- the Germans organized all the musicians, and we had, from time to time, a concert. And we Jews alone-- we organized the school for the little children, that they were occupied, that they shouldn't hang around until they had the Children's Action and they took away all the children.

But up until then, they-- and once you are alive, and you always hope that it might be tomorrow, or the next day, or the next day it'll be over. And as I said before, we were still with our families. I even got married in the ghetto, so there was romance and everything, more or less like-- I wouldn't say a perfect, normal life because you always said, tomorrow they have an action, and you will be the next one. But when the morning started and you were still alive and-- so another day was gone.

Tell me again about the workshops. I'm sorry, but there was a big plane when you told me.

The workshops were-- and they were very good for the ghetto because people were occupied, and they had where to go because if you didn't have any job-- not everybody could go out of the ghetto to the working places because there wasn't so much demand, so we made there-- there was a laundry to wash the-- soldiers, whoever brought the laundry. There was also a repair shop for the uniforms to repair it. Shoemakers with there. They made the boots for the soldiers. We even made toys as they had different kinds of departments.

But basically to serve the Germans?

Oh, yeah, sure. We could not bring our laundry there or our shoes, no. It was only because it was supervised, and they came-- we rarely even knew when an inspection will come.

Tell me about the Jewish police, the ghetto police.

The ghetto police-- they had it very tough because on one side, they were commanded to work with the Germans. On the other side, they wanted to help the Jews. So in general, they were all very nice. There were a few, what you find all over, who wanted to be holier than the pope, but in general, they were nice.

And they warned the people, and it was-- really, they looked out for each other because we were all in the same boat. And we knew that if we'll be destroyed, we'll be destroyed all of us. If you were a policeman or if you were not a policeman, you will have the same faith. And it so happens that sometimes the policeman went first.

Like?

Well, because it might be they knew a little bit more, or they were involved in something. So they were shot before the others.

And spiritual life, religion?

Religion was-- if you were religious, you were religious. For instance, my mother-- up to her last day, she didn't touch any meat. For us she cooked because she felt that we need the strength, but she didn't. And our meat consisted of dead horse meat, and sometimes, if you were lucky, when you bought from-- out of the ghetto you bought some lard or some ham, what the Jewish religion does not allow.

So she didn't touch not even the morsel of that, but for us children and for my father, she felt that we go to-- because she did not go to work. She stayed home. So she felt that we needed it more, and she cooked for us, and we ate at.

I think we're about [INAUDIBLE].

And later my mother-in-law--

Tell me a little bit about the ghetto council.

The ghetto counsel consisted of six, I think, or seven men. They were all lawyers or doctors. In fact, the Dr. Elkes-- he was from the same town like my mother, and whenever there was some problems or my mother had something, the first thing was Dr. Elkes. And they were also-- they were under big pressure, but they still were helping us. And they looked out more for the Jews, and the few times they had really, I think, big arguments with the Germans, that they did not comply to their orders or to their-- because as I said, we were all under the same rule, and they really didn't look out to save themselves and to give the other people not a chance.

So in general, it was OK. It was hard for those sent to work because not all the workplaces were good ones. So how do you-- if somebody got a better-- where he could exchange these things for better things, and some were [? not-- ?] when none of the Lithuanian people came to exchange. But in general, it worked out very well, and I think there was not too many what were against Judenrat.

Did they have terribly difficult choices? Did they have to prepare lists [? when ?] [? ordered ?]?

They had to prepare lists, but they also didn't always. And in fact, in 1943, they were supposed to give a certain amount-- I forgot how many were supposed to be delivered, and they didn't give out so many. So in the Germans went, and whoever they grabbed they grabbed. In fact, that's when my mother went away and my husband's whole family, his mother, his two married sisters with their children.

So they had to choose people for selections, and they didn't necessarily know what was going to happen?

No, they didn't because they were always told that they are going to work. So it was up to more or less-- sometimes they probably choose single people. Sometimes they choose young people. But in general, mostly, also, they ask also for volunteers, and a lot even volunteered because they thought that maybe there it will be better because you really didn't know. And a lot of times it really worked out that you were sent to labor camps.

There was a [PLACE NAME]. There was a big group, and there was in [? Paneriu ?] a big group. And they worked there like from the ghetto, and later, they were also brought to Stutthof or to the concentration camps. So you really were never sure if that is a selection for death or for work.

Tell me about the Kinder Aktion.

The Kinder Aktion-- that was when the people had gone to work in the morning. All of a sudden, there came into the ghetto a lot of buses with their windows painted black, and the Germans, with their Lithuanian helpers because they didn't go anyplace without them because they did the dirty work. A lot of times, the Germans did it, too, but they always had the helpers.

And they went from house to house, and wherever they found children they took them. There was one man-- he didn't want to give his daughter, so they took him, too. And there was another lady-- she was even a Gentile, and she was married to a Jew. And she opted to go into the ghetto with her husband and the two children. And when they came, at that time she even said-- she said, my brothers are on the front fighting for you, and you want to take me and my children. But that didn't mean anything. She was, unfortunately, taken away with her two children.

What did you see of that? You were at work, right?

No, I was, at that time, in the ghetto, and I was there. And we saw that the people were running on the street, and in fact, my cousin with the two children-- we hid them, and lucky had it-- they didn't find them, and they were saved. The little girl was about eight or nine, and the little boy was maybe five.

Tell me about the grief, the sadness.

Well, when the people came back from work and they didn't find their children, I don't have to tell you what that means. It's bad enough, sometimes, that you lose a child, but to work so hard, and come back, and then don't find them-- so you

could only hear crying, and crying, and not even crying, shouting from grief, and hitting their heads on walls. And that went on for quite a few days.

Tell me about how your niece and nephew were-- where they were hiding.

We had built a little-- not we, the whole house where we lived had built in the yard to go downstairs and then in the ground there, and that was supposed to be for the whole house. So we took them down there, and it so happens they didn't find them. A few children were somewhere, in an attic somewhere, a double wall, so a few children were saved. But it was like not even a fraction of the people what they-- of the children what they took. But at that time, we were lucky. We had the children.

And tell me about other hiding places besides that one, sort of in general.

Well, people dug out from underneath their houses, cellar. Some dug under the fence to go to the Gentile side, whoever had the means. Also, we really didn't know because those things were not publicized.

And was the ghetto very different towards the end than it had been earlier?

Absolutely because once the children were away-- first of all, you didn't have the school anymore. You didn't, also, hear some children. Children are children. When it was calm, they ran around. They talked. They sang, and the mood from all the people were very, very low.

We also knew a little bit what was going on with the war, and we also always felt that we won't see it, that before the war will finish we'll be-- so the mood after each selection, and after each month, and after each thing what was probably when we heard that the Germans were defeated in Russia-- for us, it was not like a joy. For us, it was always, well, soon our time will come to be destroyed and killed.

Was the ghetto getting smaller?

Yeah, because some people went into hiding. Some people went to the partisans, and with the selections it was always getting smaller and smaller.

So by the end, about how many people were there? Do you know?

This I really don't know.

I think we're about to run out, and I don't have a short question. Tell me about the trading for butter.

Well, when you went and you got-- and you were so happy you got a piece of butter, and what will that mean when you come back to the ghetto and present that to your family? And then when you opened it, there was mashed potatoes in and it was only a coating of butter or margarine. So that was a big disappointment because you gave away a lot of things and a lot of good things because, when the Russians came--