

--and they were the Kazakhs. And at some point, I had a teacher who was a doctor. And he was teaching because he couldn't-- people came to Czechoslovakia to get away from Romania and from Russia. And some of these people were professional people. And because there was a shortage of teachers, they became teachers.

You know--

OK, we're rolling. You guys can start.

We're rolling. Can we get some water? Is there any--

There is the bathroom in the back.

Yeah, there's some glasses over here. I'll get some water.

Also, I may not respond to you.

That's OK.

I'll just let you talk. I don't want to interrupt.

OK, that's fine.

Because whatever I say gets picked up.

OK, I understand. So when we're going to start, I'm just going to start out from where I--

I'll ask you a question.

OK, you'll ask a question. You will introduce yourself. OK, good.

[THUDDING SOUND OFF-CAMERA]

Are you monitoring your camera?

Hmm?

Are you monitoring your camera? We just need one. One is fine.

Well.

Can you hear the sound at all? Yeah.

Oh, you mean the sound from here?

Yeah.

There's a drinking fountain [INAUDIBLE].

There is--

Give us 10 seconds.

[? That's ?] helped.

OK, it's all yours.

I'm Howard Felson with the Holocaust Oral History Project. And I'm interviewing Miriam Samuel in Oakland, California, at Beth Jacob Synagogue on February 7, 1989.

Miriam, could you tell me when you were born and where you were born, what town.

I was born in Czechoslovakia, July 24, 1924. And I lived in a very small town by the name of [? TÃ°lavÃ°. ?] I had a large family. I had very young parents. At that time, I think people were getting married, after first World War, quite young.

My father was a war veteran. And my father, in our small town, he was the most educated man. So a lot of people would come to him for advice. He also represented the town at government level. Because he was educated. And there weren't that many educated people.

Czechoslovakia was a very Democratic country. We lived through some very difficult times during the Depression. I heard that here wasn't that great either, but there was very bad. The Czechs built roads to nowhere to give people jobs.

We felt very safe when the Czech gendarme, when the Czech police were around, because they were very protective of every individual. Though the people where we lived were the Ukrainian and white Russian, and they were very antisemitic.

I went to a school where we used to have, in our classroom, 65 children during the wintertime. It was a farming town. So during the summer, there weren't as many pupils. They said the Lord's prayer in the morning. And we weren't obliged to do so because I was Jewish, the Jewish children. We weren't required to go to religious training.

My father, because he was a war veteran, had the type of businesses that other people couldn't get licenses, like tobacco and liquor.

What kind of work did he do?

Well, we had licenses for the stores, for selling tobacco and liquor. Most people couldn't get those type of licenses except if they were veterans or they had some type of things that they have needed in that community. So that was some type of a good thing to have.

And also, because we were such a large family, I don't think he could make a living from those two things. So he had to go out and do other business. He built bridges, he designed bridges, railroad tracks, sell the materials for it, the ties and things.

He did all kinds of different jobs. He tried his hand at everything, especially during the Depression.

Later on, when Germany started being antisemitic and Hitler came into power, things started changing for us too. First of all, we were scared. It was in the news all the time. Now, we did not have radios and televisions like now and here. But my father had three newspapers that came from different countries. He read The New York Times, I think. And it used to come written in-- I think it was The Times-- it was written in Yiddish. And he read the [? Wasche ?] [? Blatt. ?] And he read a paper that came from London. And he would compare notes of the three papers. And so he knew that things weren't good.

When I was 14 years old, at the time, my father said, nothing good is going to happen here. And I was the second child in the family.

How many children were in your family?

Eight. I had seven brothers. One was older than me, and all the rest were younger. My father wanted to send me away. So I went and I had pictures taken. He made out a passport for me, some type of passport that's called an international passport, that I'm a homeless person, so that I would be able to leave. And but it didn't happen, because I was too young to travel by myself. He did not have enough money to pay for somebody else to take me. I would have had to go through Germany to England. And from there, he was hoping I could come to the United States or Palestine.

You said that Ukrainians and white Russians who lived around you were antisemitic.

Very.

How did you know that?

Well, first of all, what they did is-- I will come later to what they did when they took us away. But during all of this time, we lived across the street from a church. On Easter and Christmas, they'd throw stones at Jewish homes. A Jewish child was not safe if we went by ourselves any place. When children went to Hebrew school, cheder, especially if it was early in the morning, they would be caught and beaten. Even to go to public schools, I remember that some of the kids would wait for us and beat us up because we were Jewish, and for no other reason.

Their belief was that we killed their Lord. And so we were supposed to be punished for it. This was their teaching. It was Russian Catholic. The main religion was Russian Catholic, and some Roman Catholic. And they preached a lot of this in their churches.

Were you ever beaten?

Oh, yes, many times, many times. I also learned to protect myself. Well, first of all, I tried to stay away from wherever I saw a group of kids, or even older kids than me, adults, when it came to Jewish children, they really were brutal. And this experience was not just for me, but for most Jewish children.

A lot of times, I think, I was beaten on the way to school by a boy who was in my classroom. And every time I went to school, I had to run because he would beat me up. So at one point, me and another girl, a Jewish girl, my girlfriend, went together. And when he was trying to beat us up, we jumped him and pulled his jacket over his head and beat him. He never beat me again.

But those were the type of things that were practiced from their homes. Though the Jewish people lived in their own type of surroundings, they had their own type of lives. We lived mainly on the main street, our group of Jewish people who were next to each other. It was like for protection.

Was your family observant?

Very observant. My father was a yeshiva bochur. And he was also cantor. And there was a lot of music in our home.

All of the people who lived in our town were very observant. If not, they would have been excommunicated. There was no such thing as not eating kosher, or not going to temple, or intermarriage, or anything like that, especially in my community. In the bigger cities, it was more acceptable. But in the small towns, it wasn't. And it was really for self-preservation.

We also practiced-- when anybody traveled, Jewish people traveled, they were salesmen or they had wagons and they were hauling, like truck drivers, goods from one town to the other. We always asked them to come and have a meal with us whenever they were passing by. It was a practice that-- it was almost like, at dinner time, when we were going to have dinner, if a wagon drove by, my mother would say, see if somebody is driving by. And we would stop them and say, come on in and eat with us. It was a practice.

We always had strangers for Shabbat. I always have to give up my bed for them, because I had my own room, and I would sleep with my mother. It was a practice. It was practice all the time, because a Jewish person couldn't stay any

other place. They had to stay with another Jewish family.

Where was your mother from?

My mother was from born in the same town as we lived. My father was from ĀEierna, which my husband is also from there-- was from a different town. But my mother lived-- her father was a very well-to-do landowner. And he also practiced law in the community. And so my grandfather died of influenza after first World War, before my mother got married. And so she lived on that property. Of course my father wanted to build another house and all of that. But basically we lived in the same town where my mother was born, and my grandfather. So it was generations in the same town.

And our relatives and so on owned, like, the whole block. There Jewish people did own land. I don't know, in history, how it was. But in my time, Jewish people did own land. So like the whole block was-- my family lived, uncles and aunts and brother-in-laws and sister-in-laws, and cousins, and so on. That was as far as the town goes.

As I say, it was a very small town. We had a synagogue, we had a mikvah, they had all of the things that bigger towns had. We had a cheder, and a rabbi, a melamed. And most of the time, it was in our house, because we were such a large family that we had to pay-- well, for our children, we needed a tutor all the time. And education was the most important thing that my father taught us. He said that's more important to have a good education than to have money or wealth or anything else.

And my older brother went to the gymnasium in [Chust It was a royal gymnasium. And he was one of those gifted children that he started when he was in the fifth grade.

What kind of school did you go to?

Well, I just finished grade school, the eighth grade, because the war started right after. There was a mobilization by the Czechs. Schools were closed. The schools were taken over for military purposes. Even our home was taken. Then the Hungarians came in. because we had, as I said, the liquor store and tobacco, the front of our house was a large bar, with cages for certain things. I think it was different than here.

You sold liquor and tobacco from--

Well, in the front of the house was the business and the back was where we lived. And so they occupied part of our house. They just let us have the kitchen and two rooms. The field hospital was in our house and the examining room. And the doctors lived there during the time of occupation.

What year was this?

When did the Hungarians come in? I think it was '39, '40. To be very honest, I'm having a very hard time with dates. It seems like everything's get jumbled in. But I think it was the end of '39.

After the Anschluss

Yes. So we were occupied by the Hungarians. And they took away my father's licenses. They gave it to next-door neighbor who wasn't Jewish. So we had a very hard time making a living. And my parents were just about ready to give up because it was such a shock.

My father was fighting in the Austro-Hungarian army. And he lost one hand there. So it was a big shock that they came in and treated him that badly.

So me and my brother baked rolls-- I baked them, my brother was selling them to the Hungarian soldiers. Because by the time they got their bread from Hungary, wherever they were sending it, it was very stale. And they wanted to have fresh bread. So we baked rolls. And while they were marching or whatever, my brother would run with a basket and sell

them the rolls.

Also my brother was released from the gymnasium, because Jewish children were not allowed to go anymore for higher education. He wanted to be a doctor.

Was this after--

This was after Hungary, before German. Then the Germans occupied the Czechs and the Hungarians occupied other part. They divided Czechoslovakia into two.

So things were pretty tough, actually, at the time. The Hungarian soldiers, Jewish, were still in the army at the time. And they still did not feel the same pressure against Jews as we did in the occupied territories. And they helped us to some extent, the Jews who were in the Hungarian army who also were the occupants. Like they brought officers to our house. And privately they had drinking parties. And we sold them the liquor, which was against the law, things like that.

Then they moved away, I think, after occupation, after a while. Horthy Miklós³s came riding down through our town at one point. And we had the whole bit of the occupation.

Then they had a blacklist of the Jews who they were a little bit afraid of, the ones who were more educated, or had some power, or had some brains, or had military training or something like that. Well, I guess my father was the first one on the list. Because we were on the blacklist. And one Saturday morning, 1941, in June, around 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning, Saturday morning, there was a knock on the door. And there were Hungarian gendarmes and local people who volunteered as peacekeepers. And they came to our door, and they knocked, and they told us to open up the door. We opened the door. We were all asleep. And they said, we give you two hours to get ready to leave. And they said, you better take your citizenship papers because you're not a citizen of this country.

So we thought we are going to be taken to some office or something like that. There was a lot of antisemitic going around. Jews were picked and cut their beards off and things like that. There was a lot of things going on that were for no good reason whatsoever. So we kind of knew that nothing good is coming. They also told us, take all of your valuables and two or three days' food. So we got together. They didn't give us the two hours.

And all of our neighbors who were so-called our good friend neighbors, Christians, came to our house and they were dividing whatever we had already. Oh, Marijke, I'll take that, oh, I'll take the bedroom, oh, I'll take the kitchen table, I'll take the linen. Before we were even out of the house, they were dividing whatever we had.

It's unexplainable the shock that a person-- you know, when you play with children, go with them to school, eat together, and everything else like that, and then they are ready, instead of protecting you or protesting, they are ready to take whatever you had, "Why do you have to take that? Give it to me" type of things. It was very, very difficult.

Anyway, the Jews that they gathered up-- and there wasn't many because I am from a small town-- they took us to a yard where-- actually it was my uncle's front, where the wagons and things used to stop feeding. Like he had a truck stop type of place. And we had to wait there until 11 o'clock or so in the morning with our bundles. I mean, they didn't give us a chance to pack or anything, just take things fast and get out.

So we sat there, and then they took us to the railroad station, which we had to ride to. And it was on Shabbat. We got to the railroad station. We waited some more. Around 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, they brought people from other towns, loaded us on the train, and they took us to the Polish border.

We rode that whole afternoon and the next morning. We got sometime there on Sunday. And we were still there on Monday morning. I think it was Monday morning, my father went-- there was our general stationed with-- there were armies all over. This was a time of war. In '41, the Germans and the Russians were fighting already on the front in Poland.

So the Hungarians were the German allies. And of course they were helping. I mean, they were with them.

My father went to this general, and he said, General, my rank is so-and-so. I was in the army. I'm a war veteran. Here are my papers. Here is my citizenship papers. My father, my grandfather, and the father before him were born here. They served in the army, my brother served in the army, I served in the army. Why am I here?

The officer said to my father, are you a Jew? My father says yes. And he says, a Jew is not a citizen of this country.

I remember my father coming back. He went with hope. When he came back, it was like he aged 100 years. His head, his shoulders were slumped. And that was that. Then we had to get off the train. And the Ukraine black-uniformed people came, which were their police, civil police, I think. Took us over.

This is in Poland now.

Now, yes, this was the border they took us to.. We have to get off the train at the border, and they took us to Poland. And this was the Ukraine. They took us off, and they were herding us like cattle, with switches, with those black sticks, beating us, run, run, run, go fast, faster. We were going like 30 to 35 kilometers or miles per day. Now, this was with small children, old people, our bundles.

If they liked your shoes, they took them away. If they saw somebody wearing jewelry, they tore it off.

Now, they were doing this like from one town to another. They took us to the next town. The next town, somebody else took us over, were herding us further. This was going on for three weeks.

During this time, especially in the first few days, people completely lost their mind. They committed suicide. They just screamed and were shot.

It was like a terrible nightmare. I mean, some people just couldn't handle any of these horrible things that were being done to them. The people who couldn't keep up the walk and were left a little bit back, especially the older people, were beaten to death.

The young girls, the pretty girls, were taken out and raped, lots of them. I remember my mother gave me a scarf, a black scarf, said, you put that on. Tie it in the front. I was 17 at the time, not quite 17. And I had a 3-year-old brother. And I carried my little brother. I tied a tablecloth on my back, and carried him in the back. I carried him in the front.

And my father and mother, my mother tried to keep my father frontwards so that he wouldn't see what's happening. Because he was terribly sensitive to what was going on and the injustice that is being done from one human being to another.

Anyway, they herded us and herded us, and they didn't let us rest, and they didn't give us anything to eat. They took us by farmland, and they told us to sit down. Well, we thought we're going to rest. And people were working in the fields. Then the people from the fields came out with their hoes and with their implements, and were beating us over our heads. That's why we sat down there, so they would have some sport. That's why I say how antisemitic it is there. Now, this was in Poland, but these were the Ukrainians.

They mostly-- once in a while, for staying overnight, like when we [INAUDIBLE] was the sight of a creek or river or someplace where we stay. And we would soak our feet there or wash ourselves a little bit, drink some of the water. They didn't give us any food. Whatever we had that they told us to take along for three days, that's what we had.

At some point they took us to a place, a large farm, where they had, like, their cattle feed or something. You know, it had a roof, but no walls. And they told us that we are going to be able to rest there. Well, people from the town brought us each a boiled potato. And we thought how nice it finally is that we came to some place where people are human-- that they are giving us something to eat. We ate the potato. Then they told us to lie down. And they walk on our hands-- with their boots on our hands and our feet. And I am not talking about two or three people. It felt like an army. Just to punish us because we are Jews.

At the same place, they took out some girls and they raped them. And we could hear them scream. And I don't know if they ever came back. Nobody made an effort to know anybody because it was so horrible if you didn't see them the next time.

They also, at each of these stops, they took out men and boys who were big and strong-- I mean teenagers or young adults, or adults who had some type of power. They took out these people and killed them in each place. I didn't know that until later on. Because in this place where this happened, a friend of mine whom I knew from home was taken. What they said is, we are taking you to work. Are you big and strong? Are you healthy? So the people who were the healthiest went. And they shot them.

Now, they took these men, I think about 20 of them. They didn't take big groups, they took small groups. But at each place, they took some of them. It was like a sport to them. They took them to a creek someplace, on a field. And they were shooting them like fish in a barrel.

This friend of mine-- it was getting dark. It was between day and night. And he jumped in the creek. And he hid there until he escaped. And actually I saw him in 1942. Now, I don't think he survived later, but he did survive this. And so he told us what was happening to those people. We found out later on that that was what was happening.

Anyway, this was going on for three weeks. And then they took us to a town where the blood on the ground was still fresh from the Germans and the Russians fighting together.

How many of you were there?

There was about 2,000. What was happening, a lot of the people were killed on the way, but a lot of people joined, some from Romania, some from even Poland, I guess, who got in-- it was almost like we were walking, and then there were groups joining us that they were herding them. This was in Poland.

Where were they taking you?

Well, I'm coming to that. They took us to this place in Poland where they fought a terrible war the day before. And the blood was still on the ground, by a churchyard. They had us to sit on it and smell it. They said that we are communists and we better see what we're doing. I mean, we were being blamed for this.

Then I think this was the front at that point. Then they turned us around and we went back. I guess they didn't know what they going to do with us at this point. They just took us away from our homes, punished us, beat us, raped, and did everything that they could. Now they didn't know what to do with us.

They took us back. They were herding us back. And they brought us to Stanisławów. And they took us into the Gestapo. In Stanisławów, the Gestapo was a big prison. It was like a maze. You went inside, and it was one courtyard and then another courtyard. And it was like a maze.

Then we came between two buildings, between two two-story buildings. And we had to march in four. This is the first time I saw the Germans. Here came Germans with their dogs and their shiny boots. And all the men had to take off their hats. And we had to stand at attention. And mind you these are kids and just average people who were never exposed to this.

And an old man who-- [EXHALES SHARPLY] this old man who was beaten so many times he didn't know where he is or what he's doing didn't take off his hat. He was just standing there with his head shaking forward and back. This SS man, I think they called him [? Krueger, ?] sent his dog to teach this Jew a lesson. He tore him to pieces in front of our eyes. And then he walked away. And we were told, this is what's going to happen to you if you don't cooperate. Move closer to the wall and sit down the way you're standing. And that's what we had to do-- sit down, by four, against the wall.

Now, we weren't supposed to move. This was a lesson for us, not that we didn't see enough of things before. We sat there for 10 days. They didn't feed us. There was barrels of water from the rain. And if we could somehow sneak there and have a little bit, a hand of water, that was it. A lot of children, especially young children, died from dehydration and from hunger while we were sitting there. And we asked them, would you please take away the dead. And they said, no, you're going to be so hungry you are going to eat them.

We were sitting there. This was probably early July. It was in July, because we were taken away in--

So we sat there almost like suspended, without being able to think or to-- it's very hard to explain what's going on. I mean, we fell against each other. We didn't know who they were or anything like that, like that type of thing, that we didn't care.

During the night, they would bring in prisoners. And we would hear the screams. Into the Gestapo-- they bring them in through the same courtyard as we were in, but put them in the other building, the building that we were facing. And we would hear the screams. And after a while, the screams would stop. That would be during the night. In the morning, we saw all of those people who were brought in the day before being taken out there.

I don't know who those people were, but I guess they considered them communists or traitors or whoever. The 10th day, they came and they said, all of the people who want to work, this way. Mother and children and old people stay here.

After 10 days, everybody wanted to get out of there. So my father and three brothers and I ran to work. My mother and the smaller children stayed behind. Now, at that point, they didn't watch us as much these people who were left behind. So my mother came running after me and she said to me, Miriam, I want you with me. Come back. She put on again that's scarf on me. And she gave me my little brother to hold. And she says, I want you to stay with me. It was like her intuition.

So we stayed one more day there until the next day. And they took these people away. We found out later on that they took these people, and they had to dig their own graves, and they were shot.

Then the next day-- no, after they took these people away, from the second window, from the prison, they threw some sandwiches at us, some food. They didn't give it to us, they threw it from there. And they wanted to see how we are going to kill each other for it.

And the next day, they told us to stand up and march out of this place. And this was a Stanislawów. And they took us to the Jewish community in Stanislawów.

The people there, I don't think, knew where we were or who we were or what we were. We were Jews. And the Germans were very good at keeping secrets. And they gave us some dry-- those big horse beans. I don't know what they're called. Whatever, some type of [INAUDIBLE] type of things. Dry-- I guess they didn't have much either. And we stayed one night there in that Jewish community.

By then, we were cut down quite a bit. They took away a lot of the people already. I think there was left 250 or so. I'm not sure. And it was mainly mothers and smaller children and older people. Then they took us to a place in Stanislawów. This was already a ghetto, mind you. It was a ghetto there, in the ghetto, to a place that they called Rudolfsmühle. They made a camp in the ghetto for us. It was with barbed wires. And by the way, Jewish police at the gates.

It was a four-story building with a mill. And they gave us boards on sawhorses to sleep on, kind of a place to sleep on. And it was very crowded. You couldn't even have a walking space in between, one right next to the other. At the same time, from the three weeks of walking and all of that, I developed an infection in my leg, my foot, the bottom of my foot. My leg turned all blue and red and swollen, all the way to my thigh.

Once we were in that Rudolfsmühle for a couple of days, some student doctors, came around, people who were in medical school and nurses, from the Jewish community, to see if they can help with something. When they saw my leg,

they were going to take me straight to the hospital and amputate, and that I have gangrene. And if things aren't taken care of, I'll die.

Well, I said no way. You know, that's all I needed. So they left, and they told me that they'll be back in another day or two. And I'll change my mind.

I think we were so gullible and so religious that, as far as we were concerned, it was all what god wanted us to suffer or something. We even sat there and prayed. Well, the thing was that my mother said, let's try something for your leg. She went and she found some cow manure or horse manure, some type of a manure. And she brought it-- because we didn't have water. As I say, we were really-- it's hard to believe some of the circumstances how we were at that time. And I put that manure on my foot. And I sharpened a knife myself, on a stone, wiped it off. I kept that all night on my foot, the manure. And what happened is, because of the moisture, it got white instead of red, the bottom of my foot. My mother got me a big needle. And everybody left the room. And I started, myself, cutting my foot.

Anyway, when we were there, there was already some water. My mother got me some water. I washed it out, cleaned it up the best I could, pushed on it, and cried and pushed until blood was coming out of it. By the time those visiting doctors came along, my redness disappeared. It still was infected and all of that. But my foot was much better. And they were so surprised that they wanted to reward me that things should be easier for me if I'm so inventive or-- so whatever. So they got me into their office in this Rudolfsmuehle. I washed medicine bottles and stacked their shelves and cleaned a little bit. I mean, I was just there. They had nothing. They have no medicine. And they were here to help all of these people. But they wanted to help me. And then they shared their sandwich with me. I mean, they have nothing to help with or nothing to do.

And then they opened up a kitchen for us there. And people who also came from Germany who were considered not German citizens, but they are Jewish people, and so one lady from those people and somebody else came to work in the kitchen there. And I guess they heard of me. And so they said that I could come and work. I was the only one from all of these people that worked in the kitchen. Because they wanted to take in the people from the ghetto to work there. So I worked in the kitchen. And I was supposed to help with doing the so-called diet food, which consisted for the very small children, of cream of wheat. That was it. I mean, they didn't--

Life there was very difficult. There was no food. They didn't give us much food. The Germans took the food for themselves. They did not allot food for especially people like us. They just kept us there until they have something to do with us.

How long were you there?

I was there from end of July or so, sometime in the middle of July, end of July, until Passover, which probably was around April I don't--

'42.

Of '42. About February, through '42, they completely stopped the food. Before, they gave us something for soups and stuff like that. And because I worked in the kitchen, I still got a little bit more than most.

So they completely stopped the food. The kitchen was closed. There was nothing as far as food goes. And we were also locked up, not just in the ghetto, but also in this Rudolfsmuehle as a camp. But some of the Jewish police sometimes looked away. And people slipped out and got when somebody was throwing out potato peels or some garbage can type of things. And there wasn't much in the ghetto, some of that, or hot water, or whatever.

My little brother, who was 3 and 1/2 years at the time, died from hunger there. This is kind of hard. His little belly swole up. And in a day or so, he was dead.

So somehow we didn't cry. It was just-- he died peacefully. Then this German woman who was working in the kitchen knew our circumstances. And so she brought me a cube of sugar. I guess she wanted me to survive. I don't know. I

remember put the cup of sugar in my bosom. And I ran up-- we were on the fourth floor-- to the fourth floor, and gave it to my mother. And my mother said to me, you have it. And I said, no, you have it. Because my mother's face was already swollen. And I always felt like I saved her life then, with a cube of sugar.

Well, then one day, [? the ?] [? youth ?] [? went ?] [? through ?] [? the ?] Rudolfsmuehle [INAUDIBLE]. They brought food. And they had the kitchen, the stoves are on, and they are cooking dinner for us. As soon as they brought the food, before it was even cooked or anything, people lined up to get the food. So did the Germans, with their trucks and machine guns, to surround us. We kind of knew then that they're going to kill us all, but we didn't care. I remember telling my mother, you know, we sound so stupid. We are standing in line to get food, and we know they're going to kill us. And my mother said, well, at least we'll die with a full stomach.

So everybody stood in the line. Some of them got the food and ate it up, and went straight into the trucks, didn't even fight it. And they were taken away, shot, and that was it. Some didn't go so willingly, and tried-- there was no place to hide. It was like this hall, except they had those seahorse things with the boards on the top. I mean, there was no closets, no place to hide.

Anyway, we were walking. I remember how hard it was to walk up four flights of stairs. My mother said to me, listen, I want you to save yourself. It doesn't matter if you see them take me or not. And she gave me these things, like "it's better to be a live rabbit than a dead lion," "they can't kill you twice," if you end up being on the truck, jump off, they'll just kill you once. She gave me this type of somebody has to survive to tell my brothers. My mother had three brothers in Oakland. Don't let yourself be slaughtered like a sheep. And she said, I'll do the same thing.

And I had three other brothers in the same camp. She told my other brothers too. They were separately. Anyway, she told them also to save themselves in any way or however they can-- jump, run, hide. Whatever you can do, do it. But don't let yourself just be taken like a lamb to the slaughter.

And she gave us this responsibility-- somebody has to survive, and it has to be you. Well, I was with my mother. And we went to the fourth floor and we waited. And the Germans, the people who didn't come, they took, floor by floor, swept through. And with the dogs and with the machine guns, they took all of the people and took them away.

This lasted, as I say-- it started getting dark. And there were those two board beds, like together. And my mother laid down right on top of me. And she said-- because they were already coming onto the fourth floor-- she says, now remember, they're going to take me, but you stay here. If it's the last thing I tell you, I want you to stay here. Don't let yourself be caught. So when they came up, my mother kind of stuck out from there. And she did it on purpose. So they took my mother from that, and my mother threw down the bed so that it covered me. And they took her down. And she talked to them in German, and that was that.

I remember I was lying with my chest to the floor. My heart was beating so hard that I thought it's going to make a hole in the floor. Then I stayed there all night. In the morning, I got out from under there, walked down the stairs. There was nobody watching the gate anymore. The place was empty. It was ghostly.

So what I did is I just walked out into the ghetto. And by this time, I think this was on Pesach, Passover. I walked out into the ghetto. And this woman who worked there saw me. And I was kind of dazed. I didn't know where I was or what I was doing. She pulled me in to her apartment. And she was very surprised that I was alive. So but I didn't know anybody else is left alive.

Two days later, my mother showed up with a twisted ankle and a little bit scraped. She jumped off the truck. And she ran and she hid. And she finally came back into the ghetto to find me.

So we stayed-- this woman couldn't keep us. I mean, she was also a stranger there. But we hid there in a cellar, kind of a basement place. And then we would go out and rummage around for food and stuff like that. We were there a few days. And this woman tried to help us also. We were there for a few days. And we heard all of the things that was going on. People were being [? hauled ?] dead, shot in the streets, in Stanislaw³w. The police were gathering everybody to be killed. And they knew, at this time, they knew that they are being killed. It wasn't anymore a secret.

What was happening here is that some people went to work to dig the graves, mass graves. And the Germans kind of ordered like for 800 people, for 200 people, for 500 people. And we'll give you two loaves of bread for it. If you wanted the bread, you went and dug the things. They knew they're all going to die. So they just went. I remember, in the same building where we stayed, there were people who were digging the graves.

And a few days later, they were taken away. And because it was in a ghetto, you don't need a newspaper. You can hear, through a certain grapevine, of what was going on. It went to the point where everybody was killed except for the people who were in the Jewish agency.

They still protected their-- maybe their children their wives or themselves. They said, give us-- we want 500, we want 200 more, we want 100 more. And if they didn't give it to them, then we'll take your families. And they were hauling-- and if people somehow didn't want to do what they were told, they were shot on the spot.

And we saw the streets are pretty empty. We were going for rummaging and there was nobody there. My mother said, it's time to leave here. But how do we get out of a ghetto? Everybody wants to get out of a ghetto. People who lived there, we are strangers here, and completely different things from what we know.

Anyway, we watched the wagons hauling the dead people to the cemetery, to the Jewish cemetery outside of the ghetto. One day, my mother, me, and one more woman just kind of hung on on one side of the wagon and got out of with the dead into the Jewish cemetery.

Here we didn't wait until they're going to try to put those people in the graves. We kind of laid down on the ground, and lied on our stomach behind bushes until things got quiet. Then we pulled ourselves, on our stomachs, out into the fields and stayed there. Now, mind you, this was in April. It was very cold, and we didn't have any clothes.

During the day, we did this. And we heard the people talking in the fields. They were planting grains and doing stuff. And then during the night we would walk. We tried to go to the Hungarian border, towards Munkács.

There was a work kommando. And in that work kommando, we heard, is one of our relatives. And we thought that maybe he could help us. So there was no berries, there was no food, no nothing. We tried to find hay or something where we could, during the night, stay. But it was dangerous because they were dogs and things like that. So we had a pretty difficult time.

Twice we came to towns where, during the night, we went and we felt the door posts, if there is a mezuzah. And at some point, we found a mezuzah at night. And we stayed there all night, waiting for the people to wake up. We were afraid to knock on the door. They're going to think they are Germans.

I remember the woman, a young woman, opened up the door. And she brought out corn mush with milk for her cat. And I was so hungry. I felt like I wanted to get down with the cat and eat that. We told her who we are. And she let us in. And she gave us some food. And in that town, we stayed for a few days. Again, another German woman who got away from Germany stayed there. And she was an old woman. And she wanted me to help her out with something for a few days. And she would give me food for that. And my mother stayed someplace else.

Still in Poland.

Still in Poland. We were so hungry that, for my mother's work, they gave us like a cup or two grain of some type of groats or grits or something. My mother was cooking it. And it never got cooked. We both stayed with two spoons there. And while the water got hot, we ate it up before it got cooked. Anyway, I stayed with this German woman for a while. And she had a boarder who was also from Germany, a young man. At some point, I was carrying her groceries, and we were coming back to her apartment. And on the window, this young man hung himself. And I had to be the one to cut him down and take care of him.

Then we continued. And a few weeks later, we came to another small town. And we were just there one night. And they

told us they couldn't help us. But there was a Jewish woman who died. They could go and take care of her body in a Jewish way, and they'll feed us. And mind you, I was 17 years old at the time. I remember I went with my mother to this house. This woman was-- I don't know if she was full of water, or if she was that big, or whatever, just covered the whole bath. And I was supposed to wash her, and lift her, and what have you.

My mother couldn't do it. I had to do it. So then I took care of this, they gave me a hot glass of water with a little milk in it and a slice of bread. It was the payment. And then we continued. And we did get-- I mean, it took us a long time. This took us from Passover until September, this trip. It wasn't that long of a trip. It was just the circumstances of how we could travel.

Every place we came, we looked, is there another place to hide? On the top of the roof, is there someplace, a hole, any type-- a tree that is covered? Wherever we got, that was our goal.

Now it was just me and my mother. In this town where we stayed, the first town we stayed, we heard that two of my brothers survived. They also somehow survived that day. And they came to the same town that we came to. And they were like 11- and 13-year-old kids. And they walked from Stanislaw³w, from the ghetto, underneath a bridge, I don't know, because maybe they didn't look that Jewish or whatever, to this town.

And people heard of them. And they wanted to pay them money and food if they go and they bring their relatives across from there because they were killing everybody, killing out everybody in Stanislaw³w. So my two little brothers went back and were caught with those people and executed. We found this out in this town.

So anyway, we finally got too close to the border where the work camp was stationed. And we did find my-- anyway, he was a distant cousin. And he did help us. He brought us, every second day, his food, his dinner. And we hid there in the woods. It was in a mountainous area. We hid in the woods. And we were there for a few weeks-- I don't know, I couldn't remember exactly how long-- hiding. And he tried to get somebody who would take us across the border but we were turned back because it was too dangerous. They couldn't take us across.

And then we were caught by the Germans. And we were put in a cellar. It was a dirt cellar. It was deep, with air holes. And we in there by ourselves. There was a whole lot of other people, or maybe eight or 10. You don't pay much attention to numbers in these circumstances. It was wet and cold. They put us in there. And these were Polish Jews.

And they told us that just a few meters away there is a grave-- they were caught, and I guess they run away from the execution-- who were executed and covered in a mass grave, and that the grave is still moving. I suppose it was moving not because the people were alive, but they felt like the people were still alive and that grave is still moving. I didn't see it. They told us in this cellar.

The people who were watching this prison, our prison that we were imprisoned in, were Hungarian soldiers and they spoke Hungarian. And me and my mother speak Hungarian. These people didn't.

And as they were walking, changing the guard and talking, we kind of understood of how often-- that didn't have watches-- how often they were changing the guards and stuff, we listened to what they were saying. And what they were saying is we want have to change the guards tonight anymore, they said in Hungarian, because tonight is the night where we execute them. And they even went into details about it. I mean, we just heard muffled voices from the soldiers.

So my mother relays this to these people. You know, tonight they are going to execute us. And it's a moonless night. I think they were talking about that. So we heard them. And so they said, well, there's nothing we can do. Everybody wanted to be left alone. They sat each in their own little corner. And if you wanted to talk to them or to ask them something, who they are or what, they said, leave me alone, let me die in peace, I should have not fought and died then, or things like that.

My mother said, no, we are not going to die. We are going to escape. And they said, you're a foolish woman. What are you talking about? They had a soldier stationed at each little thing. How are we going to escape?

And my mother said, here is what we do. And it was deep. You know, you couldn't get out so easily to the thing. How are we going to escape? My mother said, very simply. We're going to go one on the other's shoulders and get out. And whoever survives is better than not having anybody survive at all. And what can you lose?

Anyway, first, they didn't want to hear about it. But then something clicked. And my mother said, I'll make you a deal. Let my daughter be the first to get out. And that way you'll hear, if they shoot her, then you don't have to go. And I'll be the last. But let's at least try.

So I was the first out through this hole on the top. I went on top. Somebody on the bottom. And we gathered dirt together to make a little hill against the wall. I went out first. And my mother said, don't look back, just run. Run as fast as you can. It doesn't matter where you end up, but just ran away from here. And don't wait for me.

Anyway, I did as my mother told me. I got out of there and I ran. And it was so dark. This is in the woods, so there is no moonlight, there is no nothing. I was going around with my hands, feeling so I don't run into a tree or whatever.

I was going around like that. And oh, I don't know how long it took. I felt another body against me, touching me. It was my mother. I have never found out how she got out, because she was supposed to have been the last. I guess somebody must have pulled her out. But it was my mother. And we never saw any of those other people. Because you have thought that they would be around there too. We never ran into anybody.

Anyway, we were hiding still in those same woods where we were caught because we had no other place to go. Except my mother and me were sitting back to back so we could watch in every direction if we hear or see anything, noise.

So then we were there quite a long time I think. I had a dream. And I know this is not anything, but I think maybe it's self-conscious I had a dream that I was walking up a ladder that goes nowhere, just plain up, and pretty high up. And an old man with a beard is holding the ladder for me. And I'm afraid. And then I look far away, and I saw my father standing there. And he said, go on, it's my father. That's your grandfather. I didn't know my grandfather. That's my father. Don't be afraid, just go.

The next morning, when the light came out, without even talking to my mother about it, we both got up and started walking. Without any help, we got across the border and came to Munkács. I mean, we walked for a long time. But we walked across the border without being caught. We tried before and couldn't make it.

So sometimes I believe and sometimes I don't about what can happen to a person. Anyway, we walked to Munkács dirty, scratched, barefoot, half naked looked like a wild animal. Of course we didn't see ourselves because we didn't have any mirrors. But my aunt had, waiting for us, a railroad there to come to her. We went into the Jewish agency, got our ticket, got on the train. I remember trying to put my legs under the seat so nobody would see. You still have some human modesty.

The town where my aunt lived is the same town where my husband is from. His father said that we are wild, that we are crazy, that no human being could look that way or survive or what we were telling. We came there. And we were so hungry that we ate-- my aunt tried to feed us. I mean, she knew we were hungry, but she fed us, and we ate, and ate, and ate. And then we went outside. And there was a plum tree had some plums. And we shook the plum tree and ate a bucket full of plums. And my father-in-law watched it. He wasn't my father-in-law then. He was a brother-in-law to my aunt. He says, those women are crazy. He says, they're like wild animals. Of course we looked like wild animals-- scratched.

How did your aunt know that you were coming?

This cousin who was in the work detail in the army in the munkasor [INAUDIBLE] they called it, "work camp." He corresponded with my aunt. And he was telling her where we are and that he is hoping that he can get us across the border. So she had the ticket waiting for us.

He was with the Hungarian work detail in Poland.

That's right. So we came home, first to my aunt's and then to our own hometown and we were told that we have to go once a week to the gendarme, to the police, you know, like a prisoner goes. We came back, you see. They were taking us-- it was determined then that we were not legally taken, but that's not the point. The point was they wanted to keep us under surveillance.

Then they decided the only reason that the two women came back, my mother and myself-- my mother was 41 years old-- is that we probably had affairs with the German soldiers and they let us go because of that. So they wanted the same thing. So I couldn't stay home. So we didn't have any money. It was a real hard time. We heard from somebody who needed a part-time babysitter. And they would, for that, if somebody babysits for them-- that was in Kisvrda-- then they would teach them a profession or give them a part-time job. And I had no place to go. So my mother got me a ticket. I went to Kisvrda. And I came there, and those people were away. I had no place to stay. I have no money to go back.

I befriended a girl who was a maid for somebody on the train. And she heard-- the people she worked for, they go back to the market every morning to buy fresh produce. Talked to other women, and she says, I have here-- by then I knew my father was lost. I took my mother's name, Ausch. I don't know, for some reason I did that.

What was your father's name?

Farah. So she says, I have a girl by the name of Miriam Ausch, and she has some wild stories, you know. And all at once, I had relatives galore. Ausch, oh, those are the Auschs from Oberland. OK, they heard of the name. I think that's why I took it, because my grandfather was kind of a well-known personality.

Anyway, there came an old lady. She says her daughter is getting married in three weeks. And she wants me to move in with them. And I wouldn't be as I maid, I would be like one of their own children. And I wouldn't get paid or anything, but still one of their daughters is a milliner who makes hats, and that she would teach me that profession. I guess, at this point, I have to think of something-- what am I going to do?

Well, I moved in with them. And I had these terrible nightmares, and guilt feelings. And I left my mother. And I heard my mother was beaten because she wouldn't tell the police where I was. And I mean, it's very difficult for me.

So I started fasting twice a week. [CHUCKLES] And I got sick. I got sick to the point where, first, I had tonsillitis about three times in three months, I had whooping cough, and then I got malaria, all in a fairly short time. And the doctor said I have to move away from-- maybe it's the climate. So they found me a so-called other relative in Debrecen, and I moved there. They paid for the expenses. And I lived with a young woman and her two children.

Things were going on then. But the Jews still were not concerned about anything. If I told what happened to me or what was happening, I was trying to warn them, look out, these are the signs. It's showing up here. You know, Jews don't have the same freedom. They said they're in their fatherland, and the Hungarians are never going to do anything to them. They're their friends.

You know, I'm talking about the Russians, I'm not talking about the Hungarians. They actually made me feel like I shouldn't talk about it because nobody is believing me.

Then, while I was in Debrecen, the Jewish people still had their businesses and they still were living very good in Hungary. But then in '44, in the beginning, Germans-- Debrecen is a big city. The Germans came in there. And the Jews started being a little bit scared.

And the woman I was living with, she considered me as some type of a distant cousin. I said, listen, if you don't want to listen to me, that's fine. I'm not going to stay here. Me and my mother have a pact that each of us have to survive somehow. I want to get away. She says, well, fine, my father lives in [INAUDIBLE] and he has vineyards. And you can go and live with the people who lived in the vineyards and take care of the vineyards. I mean, she really tried to help

me, even if she didn't believe me.

So I went there to her father, whom I never met, to her parents' house. And that's where they, all at once, gathered up the people the same way, took us to a ghetto, and it started over again. I was going to run away from there, from the ghetto. And I was ready, somehow, to escape. Because I think, when it started in Hungary, if you knew what was waiting for you, you still could have escaped.

But I didn't even-- well, I spoke Hungarian, but I didn't speak like a Hungarian, I spoke like a foreigner. So I still was going to escape, but I had to wait until Pesach was over again. The holiday is coming.

So in the meantime, I got a letter from my mother telling me that she was caught. She hit with another woman who had a child, the child cried, the people didn't want to be exposed. They caught this woman, and this woman told where my mother was.

And I think, at that point, I passed out. I had like a small heart attack. And I didn't care what's going to happen next. So I went to camp. They took them to a camp. From the ghetto, they took them to a tobacco farm type of thing, and they made a camp out of it.

And the Germans came there, and they have us work, like digging up the hill, and carrying it down, and then digging it down there and carrying it up, in big bowls or something, just to make us work.

And then, because my name was Ausch, I was the very first on the truck going to Auschwitz in '44, with people I didn't know, complete strangers, in a town with no-- well, I spoke a little Hungarian, but didn't know any of the people, didn't know anything about this community.

When was this? In the summer--

This was in the early spring, right after Pesach. It must have been April. In early April, I think it was, early April. They took us to Auschwitz, straight to Auschwitz. First they took us to-- they called it Zigeunerlager, the "Gypsy camp," because they didn't have where to put us. Then they took us to Birkenau, to Lager Tsev. And you probably saw pictures, and maybe you even saw the real thing of how those bunkers were made, the three-layered things where people stayed. And three layered, there was enough room for 1,000. There were 1,300 of us in one of those stalls. Because they were bringing so many people in from Hungary that there just wasn't enough-- and from Czechoslovakia still, and from-- this is where they brought the most people in. It was like their last things to gather up all of the Jews to make all of the countries free from the Jews.

Anyway, we were on three layers. The heavier people were on the bottom layer, and then the middle. And there was supposed to be like 10. But we were 12 and 13. It depended on how many they could push together. And we were laid like sardines. If one turned over, all of us had to turn over. There were boards. There was nothing underneath. And our flesh went through there. It was really miserable.

But anyway, when we came to Auschwitz, as I say, I didn't know anybody. When we came to Auschwitz, I kind of-- everything out of my mouth-- I didn't want to think, I just didn't want to think. Whatever was, was. I was just kind of like a non-person. I didn't care.

Anyway, I started writing a journal in between when I came from Poland and until they took me to Auschwitz. And I think that was my biggest loss, when they took my journal away when I came to Auschwitz. That was my most concern. Nothing else seemed to matter. I mean, I don't know why. But that was something that was very important to me.

Anyway, I came there. And we were lying there for days. They gave us. As I say, there were so many people coming at once, that they would bring, for each 30 people, or 35 or 36 people, they would bring one pitcher or one bowl or dish of coffee for the morning. And the coffee was drugged to keep us docile. And you can taste the medicine in it. It kind of kept you like a zombie. So everybody, from the same dish, would have a drink of coffee. It depends how big of a swallow you could do. That was it.

Then they would give us sugar beet soup mixed with flour so that it has some things. And that came, like, in garbage cans. And again, we didn't have dishes for ourselves. And some people did. But when we came, they didn't have enough dishes to go around. So they just had one dish and everybody drank out of that one dish. So if somebody was the last, they didn't have anything or they had a little bit of the beets in it, the vegetable.

They gave us a small slice of bread. And that wasn't every day. And it was mostly sawdust. It was very heavy and very coarse.

And then, one day, they said, we need a certain amount of people to work. I jumped out of that bunk as fast as I could. And I was the first one. I mean, it was impossible to survive there and lie in that one position all the time. Because you couldn't go out. It was not permitted to get out.

You had to stay in your slot except when they counted for appell. And that was for hours. Like they get you up at 5 o'clock, and at 11 o'clock, you're still standing at attention. And people would faint. And then we would slap them. Because if they fell down, they were shot or taken away. We saw people going to the wires and getting electrocuted. And they knew they would get electrocuted. There was no water.

Anyway, they shaved us, they shaved our heads. And that country is like a desert. It's cold at night and hot in the daytime. We had blisters on our heads and blisters on our feet. Took away all of our clothes and made us feel like we are not human beings. We were-- well, anyway.

But when I went to work, I was in the S kommando, carrying food from Lager Tsev to the Czech lager. They opened up a Czech lager where they weren't going to make a kitchen because they were going to kill them all anyway.

Lager Tsev is also a lager where they were going to kill everybody. And they didn't give us numbers for that reason. See, it was the Vernichtungslager. It was called that.

So while I was carrying these foods, there were tall garbage cans, reaching like that, to my shoulders. And then I had to bend. So when I came to the United States, I had a lot of chiropractic work done on it because I was one-sided from that things.

Anyway, I was carrying this food, three times a day, to that other lager. And that kept me at least out and outside. We had Germans march with us from this camp to the next camp, not that we could have escaped. And each time, we did have numbers on our uniform. Each time we went through the gate, we had to tell our numbers.

And it was that horrible, horrible stench, smoke, burning. And I remember when I was carrying this food for about three or four days, I said to my partner with whom I was carrying, I said, I wonder what that smell is. And this German said to me, that's the crematoria. That's your parents in there. He really wanted to make us feel that we really know that they're burning all of-- he says, we are very busy now because they're bringing all of the Hungarian Jews. And it was day and night going. And the smoke was dark and things. And the burning of the flesh and bone was just positively so sickening. I mean, when you think of it. And we had to watch it each time we walked outside.

Then they were giving us-- oh, we would get maybe a couple of weeks. And they gave us soap, gray bars of soap. And they said, this soap is from your sisters' bodies. This is made out of human tallow. You can imagine how we felt that we had to use that.

Then, from Auschwitz, well, we knew that there is mass killing there and all of that. But as I say, I think, in order to survive, you kind of closed your mind and didn't want to think about it. Then, one afternoon, the SS men and SS women came with their dogs. And they had us all from this one-- I was in bunk 11-- come out naked. And it doesn't matter how degraded you feel, but standing naked in front of SS is the most degrading thing, in a group, that a person can go through. I mean, they came around. They used to carry around with a leather strap around the thing, a stick, and the dog by his side. Came around them with their stick, this way, this way, this way, sometimes they hit you a little.

It just so happened that then I had a high fever. I was very rosy. I remember, when I was carrying food, I fainted. I don't know what was with me. Plenty, but I was sick. And I thought for sure that I'm not going to be picked to leave here, I'm going to be picked to destroy. But I guess, instead of that, I looked healthier because I was rosy from the temperature I had.

And anyway, they picked 200 from this group, from the 1,300, from the whole bunk. They picked 200. And I was one of those. And they sent us, the next day, believe it or not, to the next camp, where again, they had to get undressed, take a shower. And we didn't know-- they took us naked-- if they're going to exterminate us or let us live. We didn't know which way it's going. They marched us through the camp like that to the next camp. There they gave us clothes. So once they gave us clothes, we knew that we were going to live, at least for the time being.

This was on Tisha B'Av. I remember that. They gave us some clothes and they gave us some food. They put us on a train. And we were taken to Kaufering, which was lager 4. There things changed. The SS who were there were not all SS. Some of them were Wehrmacht who came back from the Russian front. And in order to come back from the Russian camp, they had to accept that they are going to be SS. I guess they ran out of people to take care of all of these camps. Here we were building the camps, a whole group of them. Now, we built Kaufering lager 4, which was, I think, a satellite of one of the bigger camps. I can't quite remember which one.

And then in this camp, we were making underground bunkers. We dug underground and we did the wires. So the way they did, we dug out the ground and we had to carry it. One person in the front, one in the back. And it was a carrier] type of thing. I was doing that for a while.

And then they brought-- there were 200 of us, no men, just us. Then they started calling us haftlings, prisoners, instead of-- before they didn't call us anything. We were Jews, I mean, somebody to destroy. Here they started calling us as haftlings. And we were treated a little bit more humanely. I mean, these people actually talked to us instead of just give somebody else the order.

Anyway, we were there. And while I was working, an officer walked by-- because I spoke German. I mean, Yiddish German, but I spoke German. And he heard me talk to somebody. And so he said he wanted me for something. The first thing was that we were afraid that, if somebody wants a Jewish girl, he wants to use her or something. And I certainly was scared to death. And I tried to change my work things, or not to be seen anywhere. But he pursued me that he wanted to-- he gave an order. We didn't have yet blockaltestes, we didn't have kapos, we didn't have anybody because we just got there.

Anyway, he finally got to me. And he said he wants me to come with him. I was so scared. I didn't know what's going to happen to me. And I was afraid to ask him what for. And I saw a girl who was very beautiful. And I felt, she is much prettier than I am. Why don't I tell him that maybe he could call-- I think, to protect yourself, you do almost anything. So I said to him, look at this pretty girl.

He said, all I want you for is a putzfrau, a cleaning woman. And I said, can you use two? And he says, OK, if you want her, call her. So she came along. And she was very mad at me. She thought, you know, why me?

And so we both went. And we became their putzfrau. And we did cleaning the boots and cleaning their apartments. But the only time we were supposed to do that when they weren't in, when they were on maneuvers or something. We were never supposed to be in the room with them when they were around. And we were never supposed to touch their radios or whatever. We cleaned their rooms, and cleaned their boots, and did whatever they told us. And then we had to go and work in the SS kitchen, me and this girl.

And so there, things were just a little bit easier because of that. Because I remember a high officer, we had to take off his things that he got, his stars and stripes, and change it to the SS things. And he had tears in his eyes. he. Didn't like the idea of becoming an SS. He was an older man.

So I worked in the SS kitchen in Kaufering for a while. And in the meantime, after they finished building the camp, they brought in men from Lodz. And the camps were separate-- and from Greece they brought in a lot of men. And they were

working in the fields and in building munition tanks. I don't quite know because I worked in the kitchen.

Was this camp near Auschwitz?

No. No, this camp was Buchenwald or one of those. It's a satellite of one of the bigger camps.

In Poland.

I think it was in Germany. This was in Germany. Because me and my friend, then, they rented this house to go and work for other people. Like my friend was a dressmaker. She went to make a wedding dress for somebody. So we went to a farm to make somebody-- and was German. I couldn't tell you exactly where it was, but it was--

How long were you there?

I was there until about March. And then the men were dying of typhoid. There was a big typhoid epidemic in the camp. And they wouldn't let us anymore go and work in the SS kitchen. Because we had to walk through the men's camp, and they didn't want to-- it was completely closed up.

So we would go across to the men's camp, and boil their clothes, and clean it so that-- you know, that's with lice-- so they would survive. And then they took the women. None of the women got the typhoid, just the men. They took some of the women and they took us to a different camp. It was Kaufering 7 instead of 4.

Our welcoming committee there, when they brought us there they had three people, three men hanging on the entrance of the things, on one of the bunkers. To see that, if somebody wants to run away or do something, what happened to them.

We were there for a short time. And the war was kind of coming to an end there. And they took us out on the road to take us someplace. I think we went to Buchenwald. And I think they were taking away from there the prisoners. We were going through all kinds of camps. And they were herding us. There was as many SS as there was of us. I think they were trying to escape.

And each night-- we were for days doing this-- each night, some of them disappeared, the prisoners and the SS people. Now, I don't know what happened to them or what.

Finally, one day, they brought us to like a military camp. Buchberg, I think it was called. And they told us to go in and rest in these military bunkers, military houses type of thing, to go and rest for two hours and not to go out, not to come out, because if we come out, we will be shot.

We went in there. We did that for about two hours. We came out, there was not that German left. They disappeared.

We waited a little longer, and outside. We kind of knew that what was going on. We expected it. A little bit later, two American Jeeps came in with about three soldiers on each of them. That's how we got freed. And It was in Germany. As I say, Buchberg is in Germany. I don't exactly know the exact area, but that was in Germany.

And that was May the 1st that we got freed. And then all the transports who were behind us or in the front of us also went to look for people they know or something. It was kind of an interchange of people who were herded from place to place for this.

After I got freed, we still-- when American soldiers started-- later on, a few days later, more came in-- started sharing some of their food with us. But we still weren't allowed to go in and have the same food as the Germans. We still couldn't go-- the Germans were standing in line to get, from the bakery, bread. We couldn't do that. They wouldn't let us. We still went hungry for a long, long time. Like the Americans would give us their breakfast, like one breakfast for two or something. We didn't have where to cook it. We would make little fires outside, like the powdered eggs, and they had bacon, which most of us didn't eat, in the little cans, and I don't know, stuff like that.

But in my case, what happened is-- oh, what I forgot to say is, when I was in Auschwitz, I heard that my mother was taken to the crematorium in Auschwitz, from a friend of mine. She took her child and they took her to the crematorium.

But then the Czech government-- or [INAUDIBLE] felt like they're still a government-- went to gather up their people into the camps. And they told us to register whoever is from Czechoslovakia to line up. And they came with trucks and they took us back to Czechoslovakia maybe a week after we got freed.

So they took us first to Pilsen. And then we kind of had to just hop on trains and go to Prague. And there I stayed in a high school for three weeks before I could travel any farther. There was still a lot of danger. The Russian soldiers weren't exactly gentle people. You couldn't travel on planes by not being afraid about something that didn't happen to you before wouldn't happen now.

And then I went to Budapest, which the people were horrible. In Prague, they were wonderful. The Czech people have very big hearts. They helped us while we were in a high school. And then I went to an international home. And they gave us their portion of-- they were getting meal tickets. They gave us their meal tickets so we would have the right type of food. When we first came, they even brought us, the first morning, breakfast in bed.

And the difference-- then we came to Hungary, and they just wanted to see us back in the concentration camp. The difference between people and people.

I was in Hungary for a while, and then I went back to my own hometown. And I came to look at my house and to talk to people, if somebody else came back and things like that.

And the thing that I got there is, why did you come back? Except for one woman who wanted me to marry her son because I was so smart and she wanted a Jewish daughter-in-law because she wanted a certain type of grandchildren. Otherwise, everybody, why did you come back? You know, the Jews were supposed to have been dead.

I went to look at my house. And a young man I went to school with was taking off the windows of my house. And I said, what are you doing? And he says, I was a fighter in the Russian army. Didn't you know? And I have a right to take whatever I want you.

I had a friend who came home. And her house was occupied by her neighbors. And she had to stay-- while she was there, they had a summer kitchen where they cooked during the summertime, she and her husband. Her husband stayed alive. She's now in Israel.

So you were asking me before about antisemitism. How much more proof do you need about that?

Anyway, afterwards, I decided I'm going to go where my husband is. Because my aunt lived there, my mother's sister. And she had a married daughter and grandchildren and her children and all of the people I knew. And I thought, I'll go there, and maybe somebody is alive there.

And when I came there, my husband and his brother were there. His brother was already married.

You weren't married then.

No. And I came with other people with whom I traveled, a couple of young men. And they said we were all going to go to Romania. Because we heard that, from Romania, you can go to Israel somehow, through Turkey-- I don't know, Russia, or whatever. Or there is some way from there. And they were living close to the Romanian border.

So when we came there, my brother-in-law, my husband's brother, decided that I should marry his brother. I said no. And he says, well, I have two other brothers. You can take your choice, but you're not leaving here.

At that time, the belief was, especially in the area I came from, and in Poland, that the Jewish women didn't survive, you

see, that none of them survived.