Interview with OSKAR KLAUSENSTOCK

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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Tape 2 of 3

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(Begin Tape 2 of 3.)

A Strange, that trip from the Ukraine back to a city on the outskirts of Krakow called Bochnia, B-o-c-h-n-i-a. It's not a big city. It's an ancient city, about 40 kilometers away from Krakow.

It was a somewhat eventful train ride. Twice I had to get out of the train because I didn't like the Germans that came in to check the papers, because I didn't know that you needed special papers to travel. I was on a farm. And finally I sat down. And I didn't notice two German officers entering the train just as the train started to move. And there I sat trembling because everyone was pulling out papers, and I had none.

Sitting next to me was a young woman with a child, maybe two years old. And she looked at me. She leaned over and said, "Here, take ~~(a kinishka)~~ AGNIESZKA (from Agnes in Polish)." And she hands me the sleeping child and whispers, "My name is Stella. What is yours?" So I said, "Levko." And she shook

her head. The Germans came over, and she handed them her papers. And the Germans looked down at that sleeping child, and she hushed them, "shhhh". And they walked on. They walked away. They left at the next station. And we rode in silence.

We got out of the train when we finally reached Bochnia. And we hired a drosky, which is a horse-driven -- how would you call it? I forgot the name.

Q LIKE A CART?

A Yeah.

Q OPEN SEATS?

A Yeah. Yeah. Upholstered seats.

And I said -- and she said, "You're not Levko." I said, "No." She said, "I knew it. The way you trembled, I knew you were not Levko. So you're safe now."

We drove up, and as we were approaching the town, the train station being somewhat on the outskirt, I finally recognized the place where they were creating the ghetto. And she tapped the driver and said, "Stop here." And I took my bundle. I was wearing a sheepskin, my pants, woolen pants, boots. And she said to the driver, "Drive on." But before I stepped out, she said -- I don't remember whether it was Paul or whatever. She said, "Remember to come home for supper. And be on time." She wanted the driver to hear it.

I never saw Stella again.

But I knew the road to Bochnia. And I knew the city because that is where my father lived.

Now, right next to Bochnia is a small village, typical shtetl, where the vast majority of people who lived there were Jews. No railroad leading to it. You had to either walk from Bochnia to Wisnicz -- that is the name of the shtetl. It's an ancient shtetl. It goes back to the 12th Century. Or you took another horse and wagon. No electricity, no running water. But that is where my father's grandparents lived and my mother's parents lived. So as boys they were friends.

One day, after they had left the shtetl, they decided, ~~I have~~ one had a daughter of marriageable age, and the other ~~one said, and I have~~ had a son of marriageable age, and he's got golden hands; he's a watchmaker. Why don't we get them married?

And so these two old men married off my mother and my father in that little village. And that's the village, and that's a marriage that lasted only two years.

My mother left ~~back~~ ~~my~~ went back to her grandparents' ~~home~~ with me. My father stayed in Wisnicz for a while and felt very, very ashamed that his wife and child left him, as if he ~~was~~ were unworthy of being a husband. Besides, in that ~~town~~ shtetl, they referred to my mother as "the

princess". "She was too good for us. She was too elegant. We were too dirty for her." Because my mother was in the habit of ordering two pails of water in the morning instead of one from a water carrier.

Now, when the war broke out and they all were expelled from their home town, the families gathered to where they originally came from, in and around Wisnicz. My father by then had already moved to Bochnia. And my mother followed her parents to Wisnicz. So now they WERE all together, Wisnicz, the whole family, and Bochnia, the city within walking distance from Wisnicz.

Q NOW, HAD YOU VISITED YOUR FATHER THERE?

A Throughout the years, on summer vacations, I would visit my father both in Wisnicz and in Bochnia. And I knew it. This was my, like, second home.

And now the war brought them in to close proximity, the whole lot of them.

My mother first came to Wisnicz from her city where we lived, but the only way the whole family could survive was my mother selling various items of value. And that was very difficult to do by third person, an intermediary, so she moved to Bochnia, too.

And here I am on my way to Bochnia, into the ghetto, where my mother lived, my father and his second wife, and my little sister, SYDIA (~~Sija~~). My grandparents and the

rest of the family -- uncles, aunts, cousins galore WERE residing in that God-forsaken village, shtetl, called Wisnicz.

And I walk into the ghetto still not fully aware of the depth of resentment between my father and my mother. All these years. In 1942 I was 20 years old. All these years it smoldered. It burned.

Q HE WOULDN'T TALK ABOUT HER BADLY WHEN YOU WOULD VISIT HIM?

A Always. Always.

Q HE DID?

A He never referred to her by her first name, which was Ruth. He always referred to her as "she, the princess".

My mother didn't speak very kindly of him, either. I wanted to know what happened, and she would refer to him with her own epithet, "the liar". Whatever. He had a tendency to lie.

Well, I entered the ghetto, and there I was immediately greeted by policemen with nails between their teeth and a hammer, hammering away, building a wooden slatted fence with barbed wire crowning the tops. The Jews were fencing themselves in, totally unaware of what it meant. And I stood there. What WAS going on? Here I've just come back from this utter disaster, and people were

walking down the street, smiling, laughing, joking. A little boy was walking down the street with, I think, a violin case. Another one was -- through an open window, I could hear the teacher telling him, "Eins, zwei, drei." You know, teaching him to play. It was like -- it was just utterly incomprehensible.

Finally, I recognized my father's store. He was the only watchmaker in the ghetto now. It was a walk-down store off the sidewalk. And there it was easy to recognize him. He always sat at the same high table with his chin at the edge and the loop in his eye and a face that is squinting because he is a watchmaker. And there is always a little watch between his tweezers and a little spindle.

And I walked down. And he nodded to a chair. And I sat down. And he still didn't recognize me. I was a little boy when he last saw me. I was 20 now. Finally, I told him, "Papa, it's me." Well, there was a lacrimal scene for a minute, and I was still waiting for him to tell me where Mother lived. And he said, "Oh. She. She's here."

And so he walked out of the store to show me the directions. And that is when I suddenly realized how things have changed. My father was wearing a white armband with a Star of David. He was a Jew. Until now, he was not a Jew. Up to now, he was my father; he was a human being. And now he stood there bedraggled, leaning against the crumbling wall. He

looked gray and aged. There were folds in his chin and ~~folds~~ baggy eyelids; and he looked sad. And he didn't even look at me. He didn't want to look at me, as if he were ashamed to look at me.

Finally, he showed me where she lived. And I walked up. It was a little, small knoll, where there stood a little house. This was a part of the town that belonged to the Christians, to the poorest Christians. They were ordered to move away and to make room for the Jews. And that house was now occupied by a spinster and ~~her two~~ one brother and one friend of the brother, Sam and Asher. And Mother had moved in with them.

And so I knocked on the door, and Clara, the spinster, a former high school teacher in Krakow -- her brother, Asher, was one of Poland's ~~most~~ famous journalists for a Polish daily. And Sam was a professor of philosophy at the Jagiellonski University in Krakow. My mother just fell into this because there was a vacancy. So they put her in. And here again I tried to say something, and everybody looked at me.

Well, when I came, Mother wasn't home. She was working. And Clara bid me to sit, and would I want a cup of tea? A cup of tea? I ~~heard~~ hadn't heard somebody offering me a cup of tea since before the war. They were still living in the old, before-the-war, mode ~~and all~~ of existence.

And so I waited. I walked out, and then I saw at the end of the afternoon my mother coming. And again I was beside me. A middle-aged woman, this young, vibrant, gorgeous, beautifully shaped woman with high-heeled shoes was walking in flat-heeled shoes, and her hips were wide, and her waist full. And I sat there and waited for her to come up the stone steps. And she stood before me, and I said, "Mama?" It was three years from the day that she brought me to the railroad station and handed me the coins. And she didn't look at me, as if the voice was coming from some far-off distance, as if it wasn't me that was saying "Mama". Then finally she recognized me, and we hugged and kissed. And it wasn't until we sat down behind the house that I recognized my Mama, because one of the first things she did was she taking my hand and saying, "Dirty fingernails." That was my Mama.

And I had to reconcile myself to the fact that these people, not only that they didn't know what happened, they had no inkling of mass graves, of mass lime pits where people were thrown in to be shot. And if they had an inkling, they didn't want to know. And every time I tried to say something, they hushed me. They didn't want gentle, sweet Clara to hear it. They didn't want to frighten her.

One day Asher took me for a walk. He knew my dilemma. And we were walking in this crowded ghetto where

people are milling, elbowing each other off the crumbling sidewalk because there wasn't room for so many people. And he pointed across the street. And there ~~is~~ was a young woman sitting, and there ~~is~~ was a little infant at her breast. And ~~he~~ ASHER said, "Look. Look, Joshua." They called me Joshua. That's my Hebrew name. "They couldn't live knowing what you know. It's an impossibility. You cannot exist fulling realizing what might happen to you tomorrow and to that little baby." So they had to go and pretend that they don't know.

And that was as good an explanation from a former famous writer as any. And I shut up.

~~I got~~ through these two men I found a good job in a German army encampment. They called it Kasserna, a training camp for German soldiers, formerly for Polish soldiers. ~~Their~~ The job was to repair shattered, broken trucks and convert them into ambulances. And so there was a whole bunch of craftsmen Jews. We walked out of the ghetto. By then there was a gate and a policeman. Each morning we walked out to work, and at the end of the day, we came back. And I became by then the assistant to a young Polish man by the name of Bolek, which is short for Boleslaw. He was a blacksmith. And he ~~plays~~ played a central role in what happens subsequently.

He was a pimply lad, my age, maybe a couple of years older. A face full of acne, always red because he was perpetually drunk. Completely drunk. He came in the

morning drunk; he drank during the day; he drank at night. He was an excellent blacksmith, though. When he looked at a piece of glowing metal -- and we had to have a lot of metal because we were creating springs for the ambulances so that it would drive softly, ride softly -- he never failed to burn a piece. He taught me a lot between his epithets of calling me every name ~~and his~~ while spitting and forever scratching his groin. I think he had crab lice, a severe case of it. I learned a lot.

And there I worked until one day on my way to work -- we were assembled at the gate to go out -- somebody said, "They're sending Wisnicz away."

Q THEY'RE SENDING WHAT?

A Wisnicz away.

Q THE MAN YOU WORKED WITH?

A Wisnicz was the little village, shtetl, where my whole family lived.

Q OKAY.

A I had visited the family by then. And I knew the squalor in which they lived, the poverty. ~~I knew the day that they sort --~~ They were not the same people. They were once elegant people who now sat and spent most of the time squabbling with each other.

And there was my grandfather, the man I loved. His beard was shorn. They were not allowed to wear a beard.

His face was slapped by a drunken German soldier. And he still had the same habit of combing his nonexisting beard with his hand. There was none.

He and his friend always stood somewhere at the end of a street, still debating. They always debated. They were both Talmudists.

He saw me, and we had nothing to say to each other suddenly. This was a man who was a teller of tall tales, Hasidic tales, other stories. And finally we warmed up to each other. But the day after that, I had to leave. Now they were sending them away.

And now came the great tragedy, because my mother was visiting them while I heard the news that they're sending them away. And she wasn't supposed to be back until three days hence. It was Friday night. Friday day. And I walked to work with our commando, working, repairing trucks. And I --

Q SO THEY WOULD LET PEOPLE OUT OF THE GHETTO?

A Yeah. A commando each day. We walked out, about 20 of us.

Q AND THEY LET YOUR MOTHER OUT TO GO TO THE VILLAGE.

A Yeah, she was there.

Q SO THEY WOULD DO THAT.

A Well, no, my mother went to the village to be

with her parents for a visit.

Q YES, BUT THEY WOULD ALLOW HER TO VISIT.

A Yes.

Q THEY WOULD ALLOW THEM TO BE TOGETHER.

A They would give her a pass.

Q OKAY.

A It was a written pass.

Q OKAY.

A And I was frantic. The eviction to be the next ~~And it~~ was ~~that~~ day, ~~not~~ and I was at a loss of ~~knowing~~ what to do. I finally turned around to my colleague, the drunken Bolek, and said, "Bolek, could you go and get them?" He ~~says~~ said, "Get what?" I ~~says~~ said, "Get them." He ~~says~~ said, "Your grandfather (sic) wouldn't happen to be one of these rabbis, would he, ~~with~~ one of those the Jews with ~~the~~ dirty long beards?" I said, "Yes. But mainly, get my mother out. You probably would know the way. Instead of going through the main road, perhaps you would find a way going around through the fields."

Q YOU'RE TALKING TO THE BLACKSMITH?

A Yeah, to Bolek.

Q OKAY.

A "Maybe ~~you~~ I could" ~~--~~ he ~~says~~ said, "And what do you want me to do with her?" I ~~says~~ said, "Just hide her for a couple of days until this is over. And then I will take care" -- "I will bring her back" to the ghetto in Bochnia."

Bolek just did what he always did when he was perplexed. He was spitting twice as fast, scratching twice as hard, sniffling all the time, and wouldn't reply. Not a word. He wouldn't say yes, and he wouldn't say no. And I says, "Bolek, a bottle of 'wyborowa wodka,'" which means first-choice vodka on the market. I could buy one on the black market. He still didn't say one word.

The bell rang, and we had to go home. And Bolek was silent. I went home, ~~with the whole group,~~ frantic. I thought I had lost her for good.

Well, the next day, she came back. And a good part of the story is now her story in the book that I've written, about what happened that night.

Q SHE DESCRIBED IT TO YOU?

A Yeah. Crying.

It was dark. It was close to midnight when somebody knocked on the door. And she opened. Grandfather came out, too, you know, wearing his ~~(long gish~~ overcoat). And Bolek stood there spitting, holding a horse whip in one hand, and not too far away was a cart and the horse. And he said, "Hey, lady, you are Joshua's mom, yeah?" And she ~~says~~ said, "Yes." He ~~says~~ said, "Get your ass in there. I'm taking you out of here."

Well, she was perplexed. She ~~wouldn't~~ didn't want to go. And she said, "Did ~~he say~~ Joshua tell you anything?" And that's when Bolek remembered that he put my note that I gave him, and he put

it in his boot, because before he left, he said, "How will she know that it's me?" And I said, "Here, I'll write you a note." And I wrote a note in the latrine before the day was over, and I gave it to him. He handed it to her.

And now Mother described one of the most painful and at the same time most tender scenes in her life. Because Bolek was instructed to take Grandfather and Grandmother, too. They all lived together. And so Bolek wanted the old man to come and the grandmother to come. And the grandfather said, "No. We ~~too~~ cannot go. We cannot travel. It's Friday night. It's Shabbes. And on Shabbes, you're not allowed to travel." And as Mom was telling me the story, I was getting mad. I said, "Mama, he had an opportunity to save his life, and he didn't because of that damn Shabbes. Because he had ~~(holy)~~ Khalah and some food at the baker's, keeping it warm at Shabbes. And Mom says, "Son, he too was at the horn of a dilemma. I had to choose. Do I go with my parents and stay with them and go with them to the train the next day in the morning? Or do I go with my child? Do I go a alone with Bolek? Is the daughter's duty to go with her parents or to go with her son? I've studied the Talmud, too. There is nothing mentioned in the Talmud or in any books that tells you what to do. They had the same dilemma. Do they go with me, the daughter, or do they stay with the rest of the family?"

There were other daughters, and there were oodles of grandchildren, and son-in-laws. And she cried, "God, what have we done? What have we done to be so punished?"

And she tells ~~of~~ the story of what the shtetl looked like on the night before they had to leave to go into oblivion, of what they said and what they did. And perhaps some day you'll read it in my book. But Mama came back.

Shall we stop now? I need to.

(Break taken.)

A Mama came back. Dirty, caked-with-mud boots. Mama never wore boots in her life. She was covered with dust. Dirty fingers. She even tried to whistle through her fingers to show me that she's now a peasant and told me the story. This is the story of her decision-making, the story that perhaps I haven't told you yet. Have I?

Q ABOUT HOW SHE MADE THE DECISION?

A About her having to make the decision. I told you that.

Q YES.

A Well, Bolek took her through the night, as she said. He took her; he showed her the various places that he knew very well because he slept with the daughters of these various farmers; and he hid her in a loft of the barn. He brought her some food, and he brought her some blankets. And Mother went to sleep as much as she could.

She told me that the one thing that kept her from running back was the piece of paper that she was holding dear to her chest. She says, "I don't know whether you remember what you wrote, but among other things, you said, 'Mama, if you don't go with Bolek, I will join you at the train station the next day.' You left me no choice."

Well, she went with Bolek. She slept that night in the hay loft, and in the morning, she heard a noise. And there, a chicken flew up into the loft. And following the chicken, she heard footsteps of a woman climbing up the ladder, saying, "Here, chicky, chicky, chicky." And the woman, Bolek's mother, Wanda, climbed up, and suddenly these two women were facing each other. And Wanda said, "What the hell are you doing here?" And Mother had to tell her. And Wanda took over.

She took her clothes away, put her own dirty stuff, brought her into the house. And my mother stayed in the house. Wanda would go and try to hide my mother in the potato field because by that time potatoes were high. But Mother was so clumsy with a hoe, she was a giveaway to the farmers, to the peasants. So she hid her in the bedroom. And as she stayed in the bedroom, she heard the commotion down the main highway, the main road, leading from Wisnicz to Bochnia. And there she saw the entire shtetl of Jews, the entire caravan, walking, the men carrying the backpacks, the bundles, a few horses with wagons, some pushing baby

carriages, some carrying crying children. And there she knew that her entire family was going. And she had to restrain herself from running out and joining them. But they walked by.

After a day Wanda told her that it's time for you to leave. And it was early morning. And Mother was packing and stepped outside, and there standing by the outside water pump was Bolek's brother ~~in his room naked to his waist~~, bare to his waist, washing in a trough. And he sees her and wants to know, "Mama, who is this?" And his mama had to tell him, "She's a friend of ours. And you will not address her as 'she'. You will kindly address her as Miss Kwiatek," an impromptu name that Bolek's mother gave to my mother. Kwiatek means "flower" in Polish.

Q FLOWER?

A Yes.

Q MISS FLOWER?

A Yeah, Miss Flower.

"And you will address her with respect."

And as Bolek's brother was stammering, "But, but, but, but, but, but, Mother," she ~~said~~ added, "Besides, you brought her here during the night. You brought her here. In fact, I have ways of showing that you brought her here. You gave her a pair of nylon stockings to come with you to sleep with you. She has those nylon stockings in her

bag."

The man got terribly angry. He threw something to the ground and quickly left the house.

That morning, Wanda and Mother went to the road and said a tearful good-bye, Mother dressed as a peasant, Wanda keeping all the good stuff because if they catch you on the highway and the patrols are going back and forth and you have all the silks and all the expensive items in your bag, they'll know who you are.

And so Mama left. And halfway down, before the road turned, she heard a loud whistle. She turned around, and there was Wanda with a horse hitched to a wagon, coming at a fast gallop. She stopped, picked up Mother, and she said, "We're going to ride back into the ghetto together. You take the reins."

And here I describe my mother, the latter-day Ben Hur, charioteer, whipping the horses. She enjoyed that. That was her moment of triumph. She was going back to her son. She was alive.

But I knew that she was alive before I saw her because on the day when I found out that they are sending Wisnicz, the shtetl, away and I didn't know whether Bolek would come to take her and I knew that they had all arrived at the railroad station, I went to the railroad station myself. I took off my Jewish star. I put on my sheepskin,

my boots. I was Levko (~~Bodarek~~ BUDAREK) again. And I walked all the way down to the outskirts of the city to the railroad station. And the scene that I saw haunts me every night. There was all of Wisnicz, all the Jews. Wives, little children, hats, wigs, Hasidic hats, caps, bald hair, all sprawled on the dirty little market plaza in front of the railroad station where the farmers would bring in the cattle to trade. There, in all the horse droppings and cattle droppings, there were the Jews waiting for the train to arrive. And I sat at a distance, concealed by some low brushes, trying to find out whether Mama was one of them. I was ready to join if I'd found her. And as best as I could see, she wasn't there. And I knew she wasn't there because one of my friends was a Jewish policeman who looked up and noticed me and immediately knew why I was there. He was a German Jewish boy, a nice boy, and he shook his head. ~~He shook his head~~. So I knew she wasn't there. But what I saw was the train arriving, the cattle train. And I saw how the train stopped and how they opened the doors, cattle wagon after cattle wagon. Ten, twelve. I didn't count. And how all the people suddenly rose from their squatting or sitting position, took whatever baggage they had. Some of it they left behind. They weren't allowed to take carriages, baby carriages, so they had to push them all aside. And how they congealed into one single mass towards the ramp leading to

the cattle train and how they were being ~~helped in~~ goaded on, with the rifle butts of the SS soldiers, ~~to whom~~ if they weren't moving fast enough, and how they smashed a rifle butt into the forehead of another man because, the last minute he turned around, said something, and made an attempt not to go in. And how one person, one woman, died right in the square, and how they all surrounded her. And then how the doors closed. And there was nothing left on the square except discarded bundles, empty baby carriages, and empty rails.

And the train disappeared in the distance. And I knew that they ~~are~~ were going to die. And they did the next day. They went to Majdanek.

Now, ~~the~~ another tragedy that also occurred, my little sister ~~Sija~~ Sydia got wind of what was happening because she and I would see each other throughout the weeks that I worked there -- ~~that~~ while I lived in the ghetto. And she said, "Why did you go to the train?" And I said, "How did you know?" She says, "Papa said that you're going to go to the train. You're going to go with her." And I said, "And Papa didn't try to stop me?" She says, "Well, you know my Papa; comes Saturday afternoon, he always goes to sleep."

Q GOES TO SLEEP?

A Um-hmm. Takes a Saturday afternoon nap.

So my father knew what I was about to do and never tried to stop me. To him I was once allotted with her to

live; he now alloted me to go with her to die.

And that hurt much. I never spoke to him after that.

When Mama came back, Mama went back to the same work. And life -- after the episode with Wisnicz was over, life went on. Bochnia was still intact. Oh, here and there a few hundred people had to be handed over, allegedly to work. Mainly men. But they never came back. And consciously, or subconsciously, we tried not to talk about it. They went east, and they're working somewhere in some labor camp; they will come back when the war was over.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: You were going to repeat the story about Bolek and how he decided -- why he decided to come.

A One day I came to work, and Bolek came; he came earlier than usually. This time, instead of simply veering from side to side, he was actually holding on to the anvil; he was holding on to the chain that we used to stoke the fire. And finally he turned around, and I saw tears in his eyes. And I said, "Bolek?" He said, "Don't -- don't ask questions." I said, "What happened?" He had a little package that his mother gave him for my mother, because this Wanda really grew fond of my mother, and every so often he would bring a piece of cheese or something. He said, "They killed him." I said, "Who?" He said, "We don't know yet why, and we don't know how, but the Huns killed my brother.

But I don't want to talk about it." And then he said, "How's your mom?" "She's fine." He says, "You ever wondered why I went for her?" I ~~says~~ said, "Sure." He ~~says~~ said, "You think it was the bottle of ~~vodka~~ bottle of vodka?" And I said, "Wasn't it?" He says, "Shit, man, no. You ever go to church?" I said, "Bolek, I go to a synagogue. You know, my kind. He ~~says~~ said, "No, no. My, -- my kind." I said, "Yeah, I've been there once or twice." He ~~says~~ said, "Well, in my church, right next to the entrance, they have a cross, and Jesus is almost life-size," he ~~says~~ said, "looking skinny, almost blue, and there's blood all over the place, running from his head, down his chin, on his chest, sad." He ~~says,~~ said, "You son of a bitch, you," he said, "that is the way you looked that ~~Saturday~~ Friday afternoon when you asked me to go and get your Mama. That's just the way you looked. Now, hurry up and get the fire going." That was Bolek.

And then one day, it happened. We thought the war will be over. It was 1943. German armies were reeling in the east. We were getting all kinds of clandestine radio news. They were freezing by the tens of thousands. It won't be long, everybody was convinced. And then one day, we woke up early in the morning to the clanking sound of rifles and ammunition cases. It was a gray dawn, and we looked, and the ghetto was surrounded by the SS, young men. I ran out. I tried to show off with my Ukrainian, and they

shook their head. Finally one yelled, "Estonia!" They were Estonians who volunteered to do the murdering for the SS.

And immediately, almost instantly, there were the sound of rifle-shooting. And the Jewish police were running up and down the street, announcing that everyone is to assemble to the square. There was a square in the ghetto. It was a little park, dilapidated. ~~Square. And so~~ I lived in the men's quarters because men and women were already separated in the ghetto. That is, separated to sleep at night. So I got up in the morning and quickly ran to Mama. And there she was in her little house with Clara. And they were packing, and I walked over and said, "Mama, can I help you?" She was bent over a suitcase, and the first thing she was putting in was a huge pack of letters tied up with a ribbon. And I said, "Mama, letters? Suitcase? How about a pair of heavy shoes and a warm sweater?" And reluctantly she let me take the bundle of letters out, put that aside, and she put in heavy shoes. And we went. Clara went. But Asher wasn't there. And --

Q WHO WASN'T --

A Asher wasn't there. Clara's brother, the writer, the journalist, was not there. And he should have been there on a morning like this to help Clara. After all, Clara was his sister. And Sam wasn't there.

And I asked Clara, "Where is Asher?" And Clara

said, "He was here very early in the morning. It was still dark. And he told me to pack, and he'll meet me on the square."

And there we were as soon as people assembled. There were coils of wire already, barbed wire waiting, and they closed it off with coils of barbed wire. And there was the entire ghetto of Bochnia assembled. Men, women, little children, old people. Strange enough, there was an eerie silence except for a cry of a child. It was a silence as if they had known that this would happen and there was no great surprise.

And then the head of the Judenrat, and Asher next to him, stood up on the table. And right next to them was the SS Kommandant, Muller, and they had a list in their hand. And they started to count off names that are to step forward. Those called ~~are~~ Were to stay behind. The rest must go.

And so alphabetically they read. They called Klausenstock. Only Joshua. No Ruth. And so I said, "I'm going to go stay here, Mama." And Mama grabbed me and pushed me to the exit. "You go. You go. We'll meet again."

Q NOW, WHO WAS TO STAY?

A The people that were being called out from the list.

Q WERE TO STAY?

A Yes. The rest --

Q THE REST OF YOU WERE TO GO WHERE?

A To the train station. To the train station. All were being shipped away.

Q AND THEY DIDN'T CALL HER NAME TO STAY?

A No.

Q OKAY.

A And so here I sat with a hundred other people. More than a hundred. A hundred and forty or so. We sat there separately in a little back yard facing the square with all the people there still waiting till the list ~~was~~ WAS read. And Asher was sitting there, and Sam was sitting there, and the woman whose son got killed in the truck, Emma, was also there. She, too, was on the list.

And after the list was read, they opened the gate. They pushed away the coils of barbed wire and created an exit. And they marched them away in five, in front of me. And I watched them walk by.

My father walked. My little ~~Sija~~ SYDIA, my sister, walked by, and she looked at me. And she was trying to say my name, but she clearly couldn't. She was wearing high-heeled shoes. They wanted her to appear older than she was.

And then other people walked by. My friends

walked by. Mama walked by. And all she could do is throw me a kiss. And she tried to smile. Until the last people walked by. And I sat there, and I watched. Then after a while, I couldn't watch, so I put -- we had to sit with our heads on our knees. I couldn't look. I closed my eyes till it was silent. No more footsteps, no more tromp-tromp of people walking by. And then there was silence.

And then we sat there for a while longer, maybe an hour. It was a hot day. And then we were told to stand up, to line up, and walk over to the main street.

Q Was there any rhyme or reason for the people on the list that you could comprehend?

A Yes, there was. There was. The story that will follow will tell you what we had to do.

And so we stood there, the hundred fifty or hundred sixty. I never counted. I never liked to count people. And the entourage of officers came by to look at who this was that was left behind. And the chief officer, an SS, a tall man -- I later on found out a pediatrician in civilian life -- he had a riding stick. They all liked to walk with a riding stick, you know. And he would point at people that had to step forward. And there they stepped forward, maybe 30, maybe 40. And standing next to him was the butcher, a fat, squat enlisted man, SS, with a machine gun. Clearly, the Malach-Amowes, the Angel of Death, as you

always imagined he would look like, the man to do the executions.

They walked them away. And we saw them walk to the end of the street and turn right, where there was a bend, and then walk some more. And then a volly of machine gun and screams, and they were dead. Most of them were children. Most of them were mothers with children. And I'll never forget that scream.

And then there was silence again. And we were told to go into a wooden barrack, which was very close to that empty square, and stay there until further instructions. And there we stayed the rest of the day.

Early in the morning the Jewish policemen were part of the group left behind, and even they were decimated, too. Not all of them were left behind. They came by bunk by bunk, pulling young men, powerful men. Come, come, you, you, you. And our job was to go from house to house to find those that had been shot, most of them in the back yards, lined up with neat German precision. All naked. All of them shot. The back of the head blown off.

And just when I thought that I could do it, there was a small one, and I turned her around. It was my sister looking at me. And I wanted to pick her up to bury her, and Asher was following me. He wouldn't let me. And so he pulled me away, yanked me away, and sent me someplace else.

And he took her.

And there on this little knoll right behind where Mother lived was a huge pyre of people, ten across, a layer of wooden picket fences and another layer of corpses and another layer and another layer. And then I heard the swishing sound of gasoline poured. And then I heard the roaring and the crackling of the fire.

And that happened again the day after that. And there were more to be found the day after that. Until they all were found and burned. Hundreds and hundreds of them each day. They tried -- they tried to hide, but they found them.

Can we --

Q YES?

A -- take a break?

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: THAT'S A PERFECT SPOT.

(Break taken.)

A The days of finding those who were killed, those who were hidden, were over at last. Now came the unpleasant chore of going from house to house to collect what Germans at the time considered collectibles. In their own minds, we didn't eat out of any other ~~Porcelain dishes~~ utensils except Porcelain, and ~~except~~ Royal British or Meissen. As far as they were concerned, Jews didn't eat on ordinary beat-up, chipped plates.

So we had to collect all of the beat-up, chipped --

Q ROSENTHAL, TOO?

A Rosenthal, yes.

Q OKAY.

A We didn't eat with any other utensils but silver. So we had to collect the rusty knives and the bent forks. We only slept on satin linen. We only wore furs. No one wore moth-eaten blankets made into coats.

So we had to collect that, too.

And so we went house after house, empty, with food particles decaying, and collecting in pairs, in threes, alone, with a basket, finding things that we never suspected existed.

There was a violinist there with a famous name. There was a circus clown. There were rabbis who never wanted to admit that they were rabbis. But we found it all. Open books on the tables. Painful. Painful. Suddenly we all felt that we are living on a cemetery and all these empty houses were gravestones.

And then one day, I walked into a house, and I was rummaging just to while the time away. And I heard a creaky sound. And it came from the ceiling. There wasn't supposed to be a creaky sound from above the ceiling. In fact, there wasn't supposed to be any sound at all. By then we had

gotten accustomed to the silence of the empty houses. It took me two days to encourage whoever it was hidden up there to ~~make~~ show his face. And when he did -- when he did, I was confronted with a young man my age, give or take a year or two, an ultra-fanatic Hasidic young man who lived up there, hidden in a very cleverly contrived bunker. The entrance into the bunker was very clever. ~~because there~~ It was a huge box of sand. Nobody would have thought of moving the box because it was filled with sand to the top. What no one realized was the sand was only about an inch thick, and underneath was an empty case and a door, an opening, leading into another compartment between two walls. His name was Nathan.

Nathan was the most mean, difficult, quarrelous young man I've ever met. He immediately started to berate me. He only referred to me by the plural. "You and the other people, the sinners, aren't you ashamed?" There was a man and a woman, and she was wearing short sleeves, and they were standing by the fence over there -- because he was watching from the attic -- and they were kissing. "How can you be kissing? How can you be laughing on a cemetery, amid the dead people? Sinners, all of you." This went on whenever I came up to see him. Of course, I had to assure him that the only food that I brought him was strictly kosher. I had to swear to it.

How did he get there? They didn't build a bunker to hide people. His father was a sofer, a man who wrote the Torahs. A writer. And this man was preoccupied with the cleanliness and the purity of the holy writing, as he called it. And he was afraid that some day, after they had been taken away or whatever might happen to them, it might fall into unclean hands. And so they were prepared to hide these in case of emergency.

Q And that's what the bunker was for?

A Right. And there was on that last day, when they surrounded the ghetto -- the father suddenly remembered that he had left some written folios in a little house of prayer not too far away, and he quickly rushed to retrieve them to hide them. But he was a bit too slow. And his wife, ~~this~~ Nathan's mother, wouldn't let him go alone. So she went with him. His sister that he loved -- and he loved her dearly -- she was waiting in a doorway, anxious for them to come back so that they all could go to the square as ordered. By then there was machine gun fire all around them.

And so she stood in the door when she saw them in the distance, and she ran out and right into the line of fire. And she and the mother and the father were murdered right in the middle of the street. And as soon as it was quiet and they stopped searching -- he was hiding now in a

bunker -- he went out, retrieved the bodies, and dug three graves in the garden, in the back yard. And he buried them in the middle of the night, each one a separate grave. They should each one have their own grave. And there he was.

Q DID HE RETRIEVE THE OBJECTS THAT THEY HAD GONE TO GET, THE FATHER?

A I'm sorry?

Q DID HE RETRIEVE THE OBJECTS THAT --

A Probably. Probably. I'm not sure. I didn't ask him. I know -- he finally showed me the hiding place. It was within the bunker, another wall that you had to lift by two nails. And there were all the utensils and the inks and the quill feather and the eraser that you needed.

And there he was with his books, with his Cabala, arguing with me that all of this wasn't an accident; the Germans didn't do that; it was baschert, God's will. Messiah is about to come, and it says in the Cabala that on the day before Messiah . . . .

And this went on every night when I came to bring him some more food, because he was so sickly. He was coughing, and he didn't look well. And each time we had this debate. And there's about 40 or 50 pages of our conversations. ~~It was~~ Eventually we warmed up to each other. That is, I learned to disregard his jibes and his cynicism about anything that was not his variety of a Jew.

You either were on his side or you were against him. No compromise.

So that was a good part of my evening entertainment, so to speak. Nathan.

By that time, Emma, the mother of Emil, became the cook, and she knew about it. And she supplied the food. And she had a niece. And the niece and I were carrying on a little juvenile love affair. And life went on and on with the usual thing.

One of the people that was part of the group that I mentioned -- that is, Sam and Asher -- was another man, a friend of theirs. Heinrich. Heinrich was a German Jew who lived in Hamburg, a very wealthy merchant who had a son and a daughter.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: I'm going to put this right here because your hand is making a lot of noise kind of right near the mic.

A Thank you.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: There you go.

A Heinrich was home in Hamburg during the Kristallnacht. And he witnessed what was happening. They were right outside his window. He was Geheimrat Heinrich, so, so, so, and so. And that night they came into the house after they've thrown all the books out of the window and made a fire, a bonfire, outside.

They took his son and they took his daughter away. And Heinrich and his wife, who was not Jewish -- she was the daughter of a German pastor -- they left to go to Poland because there was an edict that Jews who came to Germany before a certain time and came from Poland had to be sent back to Poland. So maybe his grandfather or his father, or who knows what, had -- they had to go back. They had an uncle in Bochnia. An old man. And he joined the group. Heinrich one day received a letter from a housekeeper, a letter informing him and his wife, Inga, that the son died of pneumonia in one of the concentration camps. The next day they received almost a carbon copy letter that his daughter died of pneumonia in a different concentration camp. And gradually -- Inga, by the way, was sent away. Heinrich was on the list. And one by one we watched Heinrich losing his marbles, becoming insane, living farther and farther back in the past, beginning to write letters to his dearest Inga, and when is she going to come home? He knew that she just went shopping, and it's time, you know. It's going to get cold outside, and she should have gone shopping with a warm coat. Inga, who ~~is~~ was no longer alive. And he would leave the letters. And those of us who knew about the letters would go and

remove them.

And then one day, Heinrich, during the morning line-up -- there was a new Kommandant that replaced the old one -- stepped forward and smartly saluted. He was such a ridiculous figure of a man with baggy pants, scuffed shoes, frayed pants at the heel, pudgy, how he stood there and saluted to duty, reported to duty. He recognized the new Kommandant as one of his co-officers at Verdun, a man whose life he saved. All in his fantasies, of course. And remember how you and Inga and your wife -- how we went boating? And remember the time when we had the cave-in at the front? Et cetera. Et cetera. And the Kommandant, of course, dismissed everyone, kept Heinrich; and that afternoon Heinrich disappeared, completely reverted, became completely insane. He thought that I was one of his son -- I was his son. And for a long time, he had that delusion, that I was the son, but for some strange reason, I was masquerading as someone else. After all, I spoke ~~hochst~~ Deutsch. I spoke a fluent German.

So we lost him.

And then one day -- the head of the Judenrat -- somebody knocked on his door, woke him up from a sound sleep, and told him to go to the Kommandant's adjutant, the adjutant, a sickly, skinny man, apparently somebody who may

not have been quite fit to fight on the front but he was fit enough to kill Jews. The Kommandant's adjutant wanted to see him. And so the Judenrat, head of the Judenrat, came in the middle of the night. The man was sitting in his apartment nearby, totally drunk, with one bottle in his hand and a glass in the other, muttering to himself. And when he saw the Kommandant JUDENRAT, he told him -- started to talk drunkenly. ~~Everything he said,~~ "Everything," he said, "is shit." He just received news that there was a direct hit on the building where his entire family lived. And they are were still there in the rubble. He also received news that his son, who served on the eastern front, the Russian front, got his head blown off. "Everything was shit. We are all going to go the same way, like the rest of the Jews. Oh," he said, "you don't know what happened to them, do you? Well, I will tell you because I know." And he started to tell the head of the Judenrat how they were all being killed in chambers, shot, pouring himself more drinks as he talked. Finally, the bottle and a cup fell out of his hand, and he began to snore.

This was the first news that we received or that anyone received of what really happened to the people that were taken away. The adjutant knew it. He even mentioned how he knew it. He said his cousin or something was serving there. He said, "I don't care any more what they do to me." He referred

to the Kommandant as "that pervert". "I don't care what they do to me. What more can they do to me?" And then he conked out.

Well, now the ~~Judenrat Kommandant~~, head of the Judenrat, came ~~comes~~ to his friends, Asher. He says, "Asher, what do I do now? Do I tell them, the hundred left? Do I tell them? Do I take the last bit of hope away from them? Because what happened to them will happen to us." And Asher says, "You have to." Oh, he got now mad at Asher. "Yeah, a reporter, you have to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. You must not" -- and they go into this long debate and finally, Asher said, "I will tell them." And he ~~tells~~ told everybody what happened.

Not long thereafter, there was a repeat performance. We all woke up early in the morning. Four trucks and SS men loading us onto the truck, 25 men in one, 25 men in the other, 25 women in the third, 25 women in the fourth. And the gates opened. We were not told where we were going.

They opened the gates, and standing on the street, leading to the ghetto, standing thickly, were the townspeople. They knew about it. They stood there with brooms and pails, waiting for us to leave so that they could sweep it up. And we drove by, and the head of the Judenrat lost his temper and yelled, "Sons-of-a-bitches, they knew.

They knew, and they didn't let us know. They knew. Look at them. They can't wait for us to be taken away."

And it wasn't until we hit the main highway that somebody said, "We're going west. Hurray! We are not going east." All of the trains always went east. That's where the main killing camps were. And somebody said, "Well, west, east, how long have we been here?" And somebody said, "I counted. We've been here six weeks and three days." End of the story.

Now comes the next story, which is called Darkness. Darkness is the story of concentration camps.

The four trucks arrived on the outskirts of Krakow to the old Jewish cemetery, which is called Plaszow. And now we had the first glimpse of prison, the first glimpse of a large area, hilly, surrounded by several rows of barbed wire, snaking pathways in between, some with ceramic heads, which would indicate that some of the wires were electrified. And we entered the camp. We entered and the camp; everything was taken away from us. And we were sent to showers and to the delousing station. It was another frightening moment. Very frightening because we were all convinced that when the doors closed, instead of water, gas will issue from the showerheads. That was the rumor of Auschwitz by then. And there was a very nice Jew, an older man, who was the bathmaster. And he suddenly realized how

frightened we were. And he says, "Yes, don't be afraid. This is not gas. It's water. In fact, I'm going to close the door, and I'm going to remain inside till you're finished." And he did.

And from then on came that camp, a murderous camp. The ~~That~~ Kommandant of that camp had the habit of entertaining himself by just aiming a gun or a pistol for no good reason and shoot people at random.

There was hunger. I was very hungry. I was ~~still~~ suffering from enormous quantities of lice. No matter how many times every evening I would go to the disinfecting station, where they had high heat, steam, ~~in these tanks,~~ sterilizers, where you put your entire clothes in, I couldn't get rid of them. ~~That~~ The same night, going to my bunk, I would be covered with them again. Terribly demoralizing to feel things itching and crawling on you.

Q WHAT WAS THE CAMP YOU WERE IN?

A Camp Plaszow. Called Camp Plaszow. And indeed ~~then~~ I worked on the night shift as a blacksmith, doing the most idiotic work making small little L and T plates that a machine could have done. It was clearly just to make work. The disheartening thing was that every so often new people would arrive just like we did. As ~~they were~~ the front would approach from the east, they would evacuate more and more ~~and empty out~~ Jews, more and more small towns and bigger

cities, and they'd either come to us or they'd go to Auschwitz. And they would tell us the terrible stories of what was happening, leaving fewer and fewer illusions that this eventually may happen to us. Or will happen to us.

And then one day, we were told that our camp is too full, that a contingent will be sent away. It will be sent to a concentration camp in Germany. And I welcomed it. Believe me, I welcomed it. Strange as it may sound now, I welcomed going to a German concentration camp where I will be a prisoner among prisoners of all nationalities, not a Jew only among Jews. Until now I was confined for years as a Jew among other Jews, as if we, the Jews, were the biggest culprit in whatever misery faced the world. Suddenly, I looked forward to the prospect of being along with a Frenchman and a Pole and a Czech and German prisoners. And I welcomed it.

Q DID YOU KNOW THAT THAT EXISTED?

A Yes. We knew about German camps.

And so the lineup came in the morning, and by barracks, we were lined up. I was in Barrack -- I don't remember whether it was 8 or 16 or C or D. I don't remember. It's been 50 years now. And they again had a list with people to step forward. And so from our barrack, about 25 or 30 people stepped forward. They were called out. And we just stood there in the cold morning.

Q You were one of them called out?

A No.

Q No.?

A And -- but I was in the front row.

And there was an elderly man. And standing in front of those that had been called out was one of the kapos, a Jew. And that old man was berating the kapo. "Joel," he kept saying, "how could you do this to me? I'm your uncle. I am your flesh and blood, and you are sending me out to God knows where? Maybe to die?"

And the poor kapo -- a nice boy, by the way -- kept squirming. He wouldn't even turn around to listen. And I listened to this patiently, and finally I got an idea. I stepped forward. I tapped the man on the shoulder. And I pointed towards the front row. And he couldn't believe that I'm doing this, but eventually he caught on. And he stepped into my place, and I stepped into his.

The next day, I was sent to Gross-Rosen, one of the most murderous camps in the entire history of concentration camps. That's where they started out by sending all the political prisoners, the German political prisoners, long before they sent Jews. In fact, when we arrived there, the head kapo gathered us together and welcomed us. "Liebe Juden, you are the first Juden that arrived in this camp; and, boy, just you wait. We will show

you what it is to be a Jew here!" And they did. The beatings, unbelievable.

So we arrived in Gross-Rosen. But you know what? I'm tired.

(Break taken.)

A I'll try for a cheerful face in a rather sordid, sad story from now on.

I think -- you're not recording, are you?

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Yes, I am.

A Yeah?

The last time I believe we stopped somewhere in Gross-Rosen.

Q YOU HAD JUST GOTTEN THERE. LET'S PICK UP FROM WHERE YOU CAME FROM TO THERE.

WHERE DID YOU COME FROM?

A Came from Plaszow by sort of an internal escape, where I changed coats --

Q THAT'S WHEN YOU TRADED PLACES.

A -- with the elderly man.

Q UH-HUH.

A And I stood there in line until the order came for us to disperse, all of us except we who have been selected to go, to be sent away.

And strange, that man; he really couldn't believe that I truly changed coats with him. He walked away

backwards, looking at me, and finally he realized it's -- it's real.

Q YOU CHANGED COATS?

A Yes.

Q YES.

A He was to stay, and I was to go in his place. And he waved. And it was --

Q HE THOUGHT YOU WERE GIVING HIM A GIFT?

A Yes. He waved, and I couldn't hear, but I could lip-read the word "thank you".

That night we stayed in a barrack within the Plaszow camp. For some reason they called it a quarantine barrack. And that was only for those who were about to be sent the next day to a concentration camp in Germany. We didn't know where it was going to be.

Q YOU DIDN'T KNOW WHERE YOU WERE GOING?

A No. There were vague rumors. We all lived on rumors in those days. And strangely enough, with this total isolation, most rumors turned out to be correct, true.

Q WHAT KIND OF RUMORS WERE CIRCULATING?

A Rumors of the war, rumors of the terrible defeats in the East, rumors of the landing of the Allied troops. ~~the allied.~~ No one wanted to believe it at first, but somehow we knew what was happening.

And so that night as we sat there -- and, of

course, I was quite content of getting out.

Q YOU WANTED TO GET OUT?

A I wanted to run. I wanted to be on the move. I was always -- I always had that desire to move, to go someplace else. The perennial optimist that somewhere on the horizon, things have to be better than they are here. I was obsessed by it.

That night, the camp gate opened again, with the usual inscription, Arbeit Macht Frei, and a bunch of young men and women were marching through. They were clearly Polish young people. They were arrested. And they were being marched up the hill, not towards the barracks. And it was a little knoll, sort of a mountainous area -- we called it (hooyefska gorka), which means, for some reason, penis hill where most of the executions took place. And I looked with this strange feeling as these young men and women were walking towards the summit of the hill, arms waving, legs tromping in a proud march, Poland, soldiers, brave, unafraid. And I wondered, did they know? Did they know where they were being led to?

A man in front of me, an elderly man, whom I subsequently met and became close to, a German Jew, he too sat there on the steps, and we watched them walk by. He was a smoker, and his favorite pasttime was to blow rings. And there he was sitting right next to me a little bit in

front of me, on the step below, smoking, and tapping his cheek. And the only thing that stopped him was the sound of the machine gun firing, executing all these young men. His fingers stopped in midair. And only a single ring came out of his lips. It was such a sad scene to me. And yet it was also a happy moment. We are leaving. We are getting out of this terrible place of executions.

Well, we were taken to a cattle train, and the usual thing, thrown in as many as would fit into a single car. And we arrived so many, not making it. We arrived two days later and two nights later in a place called Gross-Rosen.

Q DO YOU KNOW WHERE IT WAS LOCATED?

A Gross-Rosen was in Eastern Germany, not too far -- I believe not too far away from former Breslau, which is now the Polish Wroclaw.

A strange, strange experience. Those of us who could get out of the train still on our own lined up on a ramp, and we were marched off. And we walked through the town of Gross-Rosen. It was a town that looked its name. Roses. Everywhere you looked were roses. Hedges were roses. Gardens were roses. Even the paintings on the walls were roses. And I remembered the buoyancies of our steps. What could possibly go wrong? Here we are in a town of roses. At last, finally, we are -- like we are walking

towards paradise after the terrible, grim Plaszow, which was a former Jewish cemetery.

But, strangely enough, no one paid the least attention to us as if people in Gross-Rosen were accustomed to seeing people covered with grime and dirt and feces and urine, hungry, emaciated. It was if -- even the children paid no attention to us. Only the dogs barked. And then as we passed the city, or the town, I saw the looming disaster. There was a sign saying ~~granit werk~~ GRANIT WERKE, which is granite quarries. Granite quarries was a place to murder people.

And so we marched on, no longer with all that pizzazz and gladness. And in the distance we saw the camp. But there was something very strange. At first, as I looked at the camp looming in the far-off distance, I thought it was my vision that was defective. The barracks were the proper size, but the people were like midgets. And instead of wearing striped suits, they wore Hitler Jugend outfits. They were boys, wearing short pants, straps across the breasts, straps, belts, little daggers, and they were surrounded by barbed wires. And between, very soon we realized, our camp of big people in striped suits, there was nothing except rows of barbed wires. And the children were open to see what was happening in the real concentration camp.

Q YOU MEAN THEY CAME TO VIEW?

A That was the entire idea, to create a generation of Hitler jugend that would see and grow up to the idea of what Nazi Germany was all about and how you treat your enemies.

We passed the Hitler Jugend camp, and for the longest time, I thought it was a dream, it was part of being cooped up for two days and two nights in a cramped car. But they were real.

We walked into the adjacent camp. The usual, the sign, wrought iron, Arbeit Macht Frei. And for the first time, I came across music. The band played a jaunty march as the gate opened. That was, later on I learned, standard procedure in all concentration camps. It's Germany, and it was also in Auschwitz.

The music played. And something magic happens when the music played. Even though we were walking towards what looked disaster, music did something. We began to march with animus. We walked in there, and the first thing we were greeted by a German kapo, a handsome tall man. He was the superkapo, Oberkapo, (kapo de tutti kapi), and he gave us a speech, and the speech was held -- he stood on the podium right next to gallows. That was the greeting. And he greeted us. "Unsere liebe Juden." Our dear Jews. "For four years, we have been

waiting for you. You are the first Jews in this concentration camp. It was created for us, the good German socialists and other nonbelievers. Now that we have you, we shall show you what it is to be a Jew in Nazi Germany." And the murderous beating began. Prisoners themselves, they became Nazis, strangely enough.

That was also the first time when I got terribly beaten up. But it was my fault. I was snooping around where I shouldn't have been snooping. I went into a barrack that was for the German prisoners.

Q FOR THE GERMAN PRISONERS?

A Yes. They had separate barracks. Barracks impeccably clean. The table -- the furnishings were scraped with shards of glass to cleanliness.

And that's when I made my first friend, (Buniek). We were finally led to a shower again. There were little pieces of soap that we were allowed to take. And as the water was going, my soap slid out of my hand, and another prisoner, a young boy, younger than I was, he made a dive for the soap. And it kept on slithering out of his hand into my hand and from my hand into his hand. And while we are there on the ground, I asked what his name was, and he said it was Buniek. He was from Krakow. He was the son of a rather well-known attorney, a lawyer.

Q HE WAS FROM WHERE?

A From Krakow.

Q KARKO (sic)?

A Yeah.

Q RUSSIAN?

A No, Krakow was Poland.

Q Oh, KRAKOW.

A Krakow. And Buniek and I -- that was like an opening of a friendship -- became very much attached to each other and stayed with each other to nearly the end, when I lost him. He was young. Wonderful disposition. Always humor. Always laughing. No matter how bad things were, Buniek was always there to cheer me up.

Q WAS HE JEWISH?

A Yes.

Q YEAH?

A All of us were Jewish.

Q OKAY.

A Then I came across ~~right there~~, another person who I never saw before even though we were together in Plaszow; we were together on the transfer. We called him Frenchie. His first name was George. I don't know and I don't recall his second name. He was from Paris. He was a lawyer.

Q HE WAS WHAT?

A A lawyer. An attorney.

Q A LAWYER.

A He was married. Apparently his wife was not Jewish. His two sons were still in Paris, either in hiding, but they were not arrested. George was. And George was the most remarkable human being that I encountered in the entire sojourn of my camp life.

Q WHAT WAS REMARKABLE?

A He was a self-appointed morale-uplifting person for all of us. While we would just stand there or sit there against the barrack wall, hungry, destitute, depressed, most of the time very, very hungry, Frenchie would walk. He would pick one or he would pick two of us, and he would want to talk to us. He wanted to know who we were, where we came from. "Talk. Don't be silent."

Q COULD YOU --

A "Tell me about your mother."

Q COULD YOU UNDERSTAND FRENCH?

A Oh, he spoke -- we all spoke German.

Q GERMAN?

A Or Polish to each other.

Q AND HE COULD SPEAK GERMAN?

A German. It was a highly French-accented German, but it was German.

His whole idea was speak; don't sit and brood. Walk; don't sit.

Q MOVE.

A Move. But more than anything, talk to me. Tell me who you were. Talk to each other.

Whenever he saw somebody depressed, he always had a story to tell us. He had -- he was an emaciated, gaunt human being, all of it was vertical dimensions, a narrow face, a narrow body, but the biggest smile on a human being. And whenever you thought that things were just falling apart, somehow or other Frenchie managed to arrive from somewhere to talk to you.

There was no bread that he could share with us. We all had the same four pieces of bread a day. That was it. But his morale-uplifting, his care, it was as if all of the things that were happening were happening not to him, to us, and it was his duty and his job to keep our spirits alive.

Q WERE YOU INCLINED TO TALK TO HIM?

A Oh, very much so. He and I became very good friends.

Well, we didn't stay in Gross-Rosen very long. It was only five, six days, perhaps a week. Days had ceased having numbers. They began to flow into each other, like rippling waves. You couldn't tell where one stopped and the other began. Days were so difficult to take, full of trepidation. Will we be beaten? Will they do away with

you? Nights were terrible because you couldn't sleep. You were hungry. You were infected with lice.

Q TELL ME ABOUT THE TIME YOU WANDERED INTO THE GERMAN BARRACK.

A For some reason, I decided I have to see, who are those prisoners that were there for years? And, of course, we knew that they were German, French, Poles, Czechs because we saw them coming back each day at the end of a day. They came back from the quarries, still covered with dust.

Q NOW, THESE WERE POLITICAL PRISONERS?

A These were all political prisoners, with the exception of kapos.

Q OKAY.

A Who were criminal prisoners.

Q YES.

A With green triangles.

I already had received my number and my red triangle. And strangely enough, most of my friends to this day remember the number. I never could remember mine. It was as if I erased it the instant they sewed it up.

And so we knew they were foreigners, and my dream -- that is, the dream that I don't -- that I wished to be -- if I have to be a prisoner, the dream to be a prisoner among other prisoners, not just Jews. It was there; they were there; and I wanted to visit the barrack of these,

quote, other prisoners. And there was --

Q YOU FELT THERE WAS SOMETHING IN COMMON?

A We had something in common.

It was an afternoon. All of them had still been out at their commandos, in the quarries. And, by the way, most of the time when they came back, they carried on a -- you know. What do you call those?

Q WHEELBARROW?

A Not wheelbarrow. A -- for somebody who got killed.

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: A STRETCHER?

A A stretcher. On a stretcher. That's right. Thank you.

Dead or severely wounded.

So in the afternoon, I walked there, and there was one prisoner in the barrack. I don't know why he was allowed to stay there. He was a healthy man. And we shook hands. He knew who I was. They all knew who was who. And --

Q HOW WOULD HE KNOW YOU, BY --

A Oh, yes. I was a political prisoner, and my -- of course, with me, it may have been difficult to tell because I spoke clear, good, unaccented German. But he knew.

And I wanted to know something about him, and we

started a rather awkward conversation. Always -- he was always looking over his shoulder, even though there was no one in the barrack. And then I realized why. Because the door opened, and another prisoner came in, he wore a green triangle. And before I realized what was happening -- oh, by the way, the political prisoner -- I don't remember his first name -- wanted to give me a piece of bread.

Q THE ONE WHO WAS IN THE BARRACK?

A Yes.

Q OKAY.

A The gift, one prisoner giving another prisoner a piece of bread was a supreme gift, a sacrifice, because there was so much hunger that to give someone the piece of bread was taking it away from your hungry mouth into his.

Q DID YOU TAKE IT?

A I don't remember. I think I did.

But then from somewhere a door opened, and another prisoner with a green triangle came in.

Q THAT MEANT A CRIMINAL?

A A criminal, yeah. Professional criminal. That was the essence of concentration camps. Hitler emptied the prisons of professional criminals, habitual criminals, sadists, and put them in charge of political prisoners. That was his way of breaking the morale. And I must say,

quite successfully.

And the beating began. Over the head, face, kicking. I fell to the ground.

Q TWO OF THEM?

A No, just one.

Q JUST THE ONE?

A Yeah, just the green.

Q THE ONE WHO OFFERED YOU THE BREAD DIDN'T PARTICIPATE?

A No, he didn't participate. No. He stood there, as much as I could see him, rather helplessly. The other one was meting it out. Finally I rolled aside. I covered my head. And I made a dash for the door. And that was the end of my visit and my attempt at making contact, with, quote, "the world of non-Jewish prisoners."

Q WAS THERE ANY RATIONALE OFFERED YOU AS TO WHY YOU WERE GETTING THIS BEATING?

A Why I was beat? No. Beating was --

Q A GREETING?

A Beating was the order of the day. People who were -- and I realized it later on -- people who were professional sadists were given free rein, and to them, beating someone was the equivalent of perhaps today playing golf or to playing a game of tennis, or relieving

our tension in one fashion or another. You go and you beat somebody.

I also learned, in that one short lesson, how to roll with punches, as the English language says it nicest. Roll with the punches.

Q YOU MEAN LITERALLY.

A Literally roll with the punches. Try not to cry, try not to strike back or beg for mercy. Just roll with the punches and roll away and get as little hurt as possible.

I came back, and Buniek was waiting for me, as usually Buniek was always waiting. And he saw I already had a swollen eye, suffused with blood.

And that was the unforgettable episode at Gross-Rosen. We didn't stay there very long.

They loaded us on a open lorry, a truck. I think there must have been about 30 or 40 in the back of a lorry, sitting within each other's crotch, or lap, squished together. And so we drove on through Germany, from Eastern Germany into the southeastern part to a region called Silesia. It was Upper Silesia. And mountains called Riesengebirge, which is "giant mountains". But the most amazing thing, here we were driving in an open lorry town after town, and nobody paid the slightest attention. Ladies were walking along the streets with their shopping bags. Children were going hand in hand to school. Ladies in the

windows were watering their begonias.

Q LIFE AS USUAL?

A Life as usual, as if our arrival or travel, emaciated, striped pants, striped jackets, striped hat, terribly looking people, was part of Gross Deutschland. That was reality.

Q WHAT -- WHAT --

A Gross Deutschland is the large Germany.

Q WHAT MONTH ARE WE TALKING ABOUT HERE?

A We are talking now about March or April.

Q OF?

A 1944.

Q OKAY.

A And so we drove all day long and all night long. Many of us fell asleep. I fell asleep, only to wake up finally in the middle of the night into another -- well, it wasn't a nightmare, but it was another episode of total unreality because here the trucks came to a halt. We heard the creaking sound of gates opening, German guards, a few dogs barking, in the distance the flashing lights of guard towers. And suddenly we were surrounded by Hungarian-speaking people. And, you know, in this complete amazement or sense of unreality, I wasn't so sure whether we are still in Germany or had we traveled day and night and are now in Hungary.

Q DID YOU SPEAK HUNGARIAN?

A No. Not at all. Not a word.

And so we finally were discharged, taken down, and then I realized very soon why Hungary. It was a camp that was primarily for Hungarian Jews out of Budapest. The vast majority were out of Budapest. They were the upper 10,000. The elite, the intellectual elite, (illegible) Some came from other bigger cities. But the majority,

And so we had high government officials. We had poets. We had the chief tenor of the Budapest Opera with us.

We also had one of the most notorious safe breakers of Budapest, who had to his pride the break-in into the vaults of the National Bank of Budapest, the International Bank of Paris, et cetera, et cetera. He was a very entertaining young fellow because of -- evenings after -- evenings after --

THE VIDEO OPERATOR: Okay. We have to change the tapes now.

(End of Tape 2 of 3)