

HOLOCAUST MEDIA PROJECT

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2
3 INTERVIEW WITH: MARTA ~~SALZER~~ *Zelcer Kleinman*
4 INTERVIEWER: R. RUTH LINDEN
5 DATE:
6 PLACE:
7 TRANSCRIBER: VALERIE ANTOS, CSR, CP, CM, RPR
8 Official Court Reporter

9 INTERVIEW BY

10 Q Would you tell me your name, please?

11 A My name is Marta Salzer.

12 Q And when were you born?

13 A I was born January 28 -- January 27, 1928.

14 Q Where were you born?

15 A Rakov, Czechoslovakia.

16 Q When were you deported?

17 A 1944.

18 Q You were born in 1928?

19 A January 27, 1928, Rakov, Czechoslovakia.

20 Q When were you deported?

21 A I was deported in April 1944.

22 Q What happened?

23 A Well, it happened one day, right after -- the first
24 day after Passover, the Germans came in and they told us to
25 go in the schoolyard, which it was two doors away from my own

1 town. And we were there for about two days. And then
2 we went to Hungary, Mateszalka ghetto. We were there in
3 the ghetto for about four weeks.

4 Q Who were you deported with?

5 A With my parents and -- and we were four children.
6 One was sister and two brothers. One older brother and then
7 me and one younger sister and a younger brother. And my father
8 and my mother.

9 Q And you left Czechoslovakia and went through Hungary.

10 A About -- yes.

11 Q And where did you go after that?

12 A We were in Mateszalka, in ghetto, for about three
13 to four weeks. I don't remember exactly. But we arrived in
14 Auschwitz in May.

15 Q May of 1944?

16 A May of 1944, yes.

17 Q And what happened there? What happened when you got
18 there?

19 A In Auschwitz I was in Block -- in Birkenau, Block
20 14. And I was there for six weeks. I didn't do anything.
21 I was just waiting for what's going to happen. And I am the
22 only survivor. Nobody else. I am the only one. I was sixteen
23 years old then.

24 Q You were separated from your mother and your sister?

25 A Yes, yes. I was separated from everybody. As soon

1 as I arrived, I don't know, when I got off the train. There were
2 men who told me to go on this side. And my sister, she was
3 only one year younger than me, but she was taller and much more
4 healthier looking, but, I don't know, she went on the other
5 side.

6 Q Was Mengele selecting?

7 A Yes.

8 Q And he selected and pointed her to the left?

9 A Yes.

10 Q And you to the right.

11 A And me to the right. Right.

12 Q What happened -- what happened to your mother?

13 A I don't know. I never saw my mother and I never saw
14 my father again, or my brothers. I don't know what happened
15 to them.

16 Q When -- you were six weeks at Auschwitz.

17 A Yes.

18 Q And you were in a -- in a --

19 A In Block 14 in Birkenau.

20 Q And how many women were with you in that block?

21 A I don't know exactly. There were -- I don't know,
22 but after six weeks, two thousand women, we were selected to
23 go to work to Germany, to Gelsenkirchen, two thousand of us.
24 And we went to Gelsenkirchen, and I was working taking off
25 bricks from a ship, you know, and not for too long. They were

1 bombing every day, day and night. And September the 11th of
2 1944, I got hurt by a bomb.

3 Q The Allies were bombing ()

4 A No, no, the Americans in the daytime and the English
5 at night. Or vice versa, I don't know. But I got hurt very
6 badly.

7 Q How were you hurt?

8 A From -- I -- splinters, from bomb splinters. And
9 we were about, right away, three hundred wounded and I don't
10 know how many, but two hundred dead from the two thousand girls.
11 And they didn't have no more room for me in the hospital at
12 the camp, so they took me to a Catholic private hospital. And
13 I got in there and they operated on me and they put both my
14 legs and both my feet in a cast. And I was in the hospital
15 till I was freed in April, liberated April the 8th, 1945. I
16 never went back to camp. The doctor -- his name was Rudolph
17 Bertram. And he told the Germans that I died. Because they
18 came to check on us and on me they put down that I am -- I
19 cannot work any more. That I am (). And after
20 that I was wondering they never came back. There was seventeen
21 of us. And then later the doctor told me that he sent them
22 that we died.

23 Q And what did you say to that?

24 A I was very happy. You know. And I was really very
25 well taken care of. That was a Catholic hospital in Gelsenkirchen,

1 () We were very well taken care of there.

2 Q They fed you?

3 A They fed me and I really couldn't help, I couldn't
4 do anything because I was very sick. And they also kept us
5 in the basement, that we were sheltered from the bombs. 'Cause
6 they were bombing still every -- you know, every day and every
7 night.

8 Q So you spent the next four months recovering in the
9 hospital?

10 A Right.

11 Q So when the day of liberation came --

12 A Yes.

13 Q -- you were in not horrible shape, is that ()

14 A I was still sick. I mean my wounds were not healed,
15 because they were very severe wounds.

16 Q Where were you wounded?

17 A Several places. Here, on my arm, and on my -- and
18 my heel. A little shrapnel all over my body. Even on my fore-
19 head. And I was very, very sick. And several times I was
20 operated, not only once.

21 Q So, tell me what you remember from the day of
22 liberation.

23 A The day of liberation, the doctor, he was a very nice
24 man. He was not an SS or anything. And he came down and he
25 had tears in his eyes. Really crying. I never saw a man cry,

1 you know, from happiness. He said, Oh, mein lieberkin! Is
2 eit frei! You are free! You are free! He was kissing us
3 and he was so happy, really. But he -- after the liberation
4 then three men, soldiers, came in, and one Jewish man and --
5 from New York and he said that he speaks German, but he was
6 really speaking Jewish, you know. We were laughing. And I
7 speak very good Jewish, you know, and he gave me the address
8 and he said to me that if I ever come to the United States I
9 should look him up. I still have his address.

10 Q Who was it?

11 A I really don't remember the name right now, you know.
12 I would have brought it with me if I would have known what's
13 going to happen, you know. But he was a very nice man and he
14 gave us all chocolates and cigarettes and candy. But we were
15 not so very hungry in the hospital because they really fed us
16 real well there and I didn't look -- when I was liberated, I
17 didn't look like somebody who comes home from a camp, you
18 know. And they were very, very, very nice to me in the hos-
19 pital.

20 A VOICE: There was a story when I was growing up, I was
21 told, that they gave her a pear in the middle of winter. God
22 knows where --

23 A In Germany that's very rare in the wintertime fruit.
24 The doctor, only for me, because I was the youngest there.
25 And he used to hide it, you know, carry it like this, either

1 an apple or a pear, you know, to bring me because he says I need
2 fruit for -- I was still growing, you know. And that was very nice
3 of him. You know, he really liked me very much and I was a
4 very bad patient.

5 Q So how were you a bad patient? What did you do?
6 What did you do that was so bad?

7 A Well, because my cast came in such a position that
8 I couldn't wear a regular nightgown. And the sister, her name
9 was Jarda, Siostra Jarda, and she made a gown for me and she
10 wanted to feed me spinach, and I -- I terribly disliked spinach.
11 And they made the potatoes always with spinach and I didn't
12 want to eat it. And she fed me and, excuse me, but I gave it
13 all back on the nightgown and they had just -- and they had
14 only one. So I lived that time a lot of -- I was in a lot of
15 pain and they gave me morphine every day, every morning and
16 every night. And then, when I started feeling better, they
17 didn't want to give it to me because they didn't have too many,
18 you know, too much of it and they also were afraid that I would
19 get addicted to it, you know. But they were very nice to me
20 and very helpful. And I didn't know from nothing. I didn't
21 know who survived and who didn't survive, you know. I was in
22 the hospital till very late, because I was still, even after
23 the liberation, you know, I didn't know who is alive and who
24 isn't alive.

25 Q When did you leave the hospital?

1 A I left the hospital in July -- in October.

2 Q So you were there for ten, eleven months?

3 A Yes.

4 Q That's a long time.

5 A Yes, yes, yes.

6 Q Did you look Jewish? Was your hair blond when you
7 were ()

8 A I did not look Jewish. I was a blond when I was a
9 child. And I still don't look like Jewish. People here are
10 asking me if I am Jewish. Three people already.

11 Q Do you think that accounts for why you got this
12 special kind of treatment in the ()

13 A No, we were seventeen girls, women, some older women,
14 and we all -- I think we all got the same treatment. And the
15 other women, who were not so seriously injured as I was, they
16 helped around in the kitchen peeling potatoes or vegetables
17 or folding the laundry, helping with the laundry, you know.

18 A VOICE: The women stayed there after they got -- they
19 weren't sick any more, the other women?

20 A We all stayed. We all stayed there.

21 Q The doctor said that all seventeen were dead?

22 A Yes, yes. And we also had with us very religious
23 women who wouldn't eat the meat. You know, they were kosher.
24 And I ate the meat because I felt that I needed -- I lost so
25 much energy that time, you know, and I felt that I needed it.

1 Q Did you grow up in an observant family?

2 A Very. A very orthodox --

3 Q You broke all the --

4 A Yes, I broke all the laws. But I am now orthodox
5 observing. Very kosher in my house.

6 Q You were raised in a kosher -- do you keep kosher now?

7 A Well, not meat. When I come from home from Los
8 Angeles I bring my own meat. And, you know, I eat out. I eat
9 fish. I'm not very, very religious, but in the house I am
10 strictly kosher.

11 Q I want to ask you some questions about Auschwitz.

12 A Yes, good.

13 Q What did you see there? When you arrived, what did
14 you see when you got there?

15 A When we got off the train, I saw there were Polish
16 and from Czechoslovakia people who were longer there. Mostly
17 men. And they told us -- I wanted to go back where I saw my
18 mother was going. I wanted to go there. And he says, don't
19 go back. Stay here. Stay here. And then I have a niece --

20 Q This was another prisoner, another prisoner at Ausch-
21 witz?

22 A Yes, there was another prisoner at Auschwitz. And I had
23 hidden jewelry in my -- in my shoe. My father was a very well-to-
24 do man back home. We were very well comfortable. And my mother
25 was hiding some jewelry in my shoes. And I didn't want to

1 lose my shoes. I lost my shoes when I got hurt. I kept it all
2 through with all the things, you know --

3 Q In the bombing you lost your shoes.

4 A Yes, I lost my shoes in the bombing. I had it off.

5 Q But you kept your shoes in Auschwitz?

6 A Yes.

7 Q How did you do that?

8 A Yes. I don't know. I -- you know, I just never took
9 them off, you know, and I kept them. And then I just -- when
10 the man told me to stay on the side and I saw my niece was
11 there. I had an older brother, who was not a real brother,
12 a step-brother to me. And his daughter, she was a little bit
13 older than me. And we were holding hands and we were holding
14 together. And then when they took us to shave our heads and we
15 didn't recognize each other, you know, I was standing next to
16 her and she was yelling, Marta, Marta, where are you? And I
17 said, Goldie, where are you? And we were right next to each
18 other. We didn't recognize ourselves. And then we were taken
19 to Block 14 and we stayed --

20 Q You stayed together.

21 A We were all the time together. We even kept our food
22 together.

23 A VOICE: The same Goldie in Israel?

24 A Yes, yes. And we -- the day when I had that accident
25 when they were bombing I didn't go to work. I don't know

1 whether I should tell you this because, you know, women never
2 had their periods, you know.

3 Q That's another thing I wanted to ask you.

4 A And I had it all through.

5 Q You kept your menstruation?

6 A I kept my menstruation, and I never -- you know, somehow,
7 I don't know why I was different than the other girls. And I was
8 never sick to my stomach in Auschwitz. My appetite was always
9 very good. And I -- I felt -- I didn't feel -- I -- I didn't --
10 I guess I did not face reality then. The only thing that I couldn't
11 remember my address, because I remember I wanted to write to my
12 hometown to somebody. I had a very good friend and I wanted to
13 write to him. And I couldn't --

14 Q While you were in Auschwitz?

15 A I couldn't remember. While I was in Auschwitz. That's
16 -- it only affected my memory a little bit. But, other than
17 that, I was -- I was okay.

18 A VOICE: They let you write letters?

19 A They told us to write. They told us to write. They
20 told us to write postcards, you know, like --

21 Q Did they give you postcards?

22 A Yes. They gave us -- of course, we didn't have anything.
23 They gave us postcards to write and I told this man, he was not
24 Jewish man, but he was very nice to us. So I wrote to him a post-
25 card. I don't know if he ever got it, because I never saw him, you

1 know. But they -- just to say that we are having -- not bad here.
2 You know, that we are having it good in Auschwitz, and that was it.

3 Q They told you what to write on the postcard?

4 A Yes.

5 Q And did they tell you who to write to or you ()

6 A No, no, no, no. We can -- if -- they said if we want
7 to write to anybody back home, we could. And whoever was in-
8 terested got a postcard.

9 Q And did most people write?

10 A No, no. Very few people. And then I also had a very bad
11 experience, because I -- I slept on the top, we called it high on
12 the bunk, and the next day, the second day when I arrived to Ausch-
13 witz, there was a woman and she had an abortion right there and I
14 -- I never saw anything like this anyway, you know, so she was not
15 a very young person and she didn't know, I suppose, that she was
16 pregnant and she lost the baby right there in front of me, you know.

17 Q What happened?

18 A It was not very far gone, but you could tell already.
19 She had terrible cramps like when you have a baby, you know, and
20 she lost the baby there.

21 Q And she just bled and everything?

22 A She bled and nobody really took care of her, because
23 at night she went to () Appell just like anybody else.

24 Q She went to where?

25 A () Appell. Where they were counting us.

1 Q To roll call.

2 A Yes, to roll call. But it was called in German
3 () Appell.

4 Q You speak fluent German?

5 A No.

6 Q No. I used to, but I forgot. I speak fluently Hun-
7 garian. Czechoslovakian, but I don't -- German.

8 Q And Yiddish.

9 A Yiddish, fluently Yiddish.

10 Q Five languages?

11 A None of it real good. None of the languages real
12 good. Because we mix them up, you know.

13 Q So this woman bled and expelled the fetus?

14 A Yes.

15 Q And what happened? Did anyone help her?

16 A Nothing. They took the fetus in a dish.

17 Q Who took it?

18 A The Blockältester ; came and she took the fetus and
19 she --

20 Q The block leader?

21 A Yes. And those were girls from Czechoslovakia who
22 there already two, three years. And Polish girls. They were
23 the block leaders, you know? And the Haus (), they
24 called them, and the Blockältester) and they took care of
25 it. And -- but our spirit, you know, I was only sixteen years

1 old and my girlfriend, believe it or not, in the biggest trouble
2 we were singing. Somehow, it helped us, the singing. We --
3 we -- my girlfriends, they really sing very nicely, and I used
4 to join them and sing and like we were pushing the troubles
5 away from us.

6 Q You sang in Yiddish?

7 A No, in Hungarian songs. We knew all the songs. We
8 didn't want to see the trouble. You know, now, when you get
9 older, it's harder, but when you're younger, you don't want
10 to see it. As a matter of fact, when they took us away from
11 home, I did not realize what's happening to me. I had never
12 been anywhere. I felt that maybe this way I will get to see
13 the world. That was a terrible thing, to say it, but this is
14 how I felt. You know, but then, later on, when everybody came
15 home, and I realize that I am the only one, the only survivor,
16 and I'm not -- I'm not well, I'm sick. That's it.

17 Q Let me ask you another question.

18 A Go ahead.

19 A VOICE: She's my aunt.

20 Q Hello. Would you like to sit with us? You mentioned
21 that you didn't lose your menstruation.

22 A Right.

23 Q That would make sense, since you were in Auschwitz
24 for six weeks and you were not starved.

25 A Right, right.

1 Q What did you -- what did you do? How did you -- how did
2 you bleed? How did you take care of it?

3 A Well, I had -- they gave us a gray dress, a uniform, that
4 I was wearing. But I am a short -- I was short and the uniform was
5 long. So I cut from the length of the uniform and made myself, and
6 I used that. And when it was not clean anymore, I -- when I went
7 to the bathroom, I washed it and I used it wet again. But I did not
8 flow very heavily, so I was lucky, you know. Just a little bit.

9 Q What did other women do? Did you anybody -- any other
10 woman who was menstruating?

11 A No. Nobody had it. Nobody.

12 A VOICE: You know, some time ago, I asked mom about this.
13 I must have been a teenager.

14 A Brom.

15 A VOICE: You said that they -- that they gave you something,
16 that there was some kind of medicine or something that they put
17 in their food.

18 A That was in the bread. Brom, it was called.

19 Q Spell it.

20 A B-R-O-M, Brom.

21 Q Brom.

22 A That's what --

23 Q In the bread or the soup?

24 A In the bread.

25 Q In the bread.

1 A VOICE: You were told it was in there?

2 A Yes, I was told that that was in there. But it didn't
3 affect me.

4 Q And that was a sterilizer? Was it a sterilizer?

5 A No, it -- I don't know what, but it did to us that we
6 couldn't remember and it took away our periods. We didn't have,
7 you know.

8 Q You couldn't -- it would be like an amnesia, cause
9 amnesia?

10 A It would -- yes, like blank, you know. There were cer-
11 tain things I couldn't remember, you know, then. It was -- we were
12 fourteen people sleeping on the bunk, bunks, you know, and -- and
13 somehow, my niece and me it was very good, because we didn't have
14 room to stretch out, so we had belts on the dresses and we were up
15 high. So I took my belt and I somehow got it hooked on the ceiling
16 and I put my feet in there so I have room for my feet, you know.

17 Q Isn't that marvelous? So inventive and creative?

18 A But sometimes we were sleeping like sardines, and one
19 of us wanted to turn, you know, all the whole thing had to turn.
20 But, as I tell you, for six weeks, you know, so it was bearable,
21 but there were other people who were there so long. And also,
22 I had the girlfriends who were longer in concentration camp.
23 I had two girls from my hometown that they were twins, that
24 they were taken away and fed better than we were, because Hit-
25 ler had taken blood from them. I mean, they were taking blood

1 from them because they -- they took, they wanted more people,
2 more soldiers, so they took -- the twins they didn't kill, they
3 kept the twins. As a matter of fact, they're still alive, those
4 girls.

5 Q They used them for blood?

6 A No, no, they used the blood from the twins and they
7 gave it to the German people so they produce more people.

8 Q Twins, oh.

9 A Twins.

10 Q I didn't know that.

11 A Yes.

12 Q So they thought that there was some kind of a genetic
13 chance that they'd produce --

14 A Yes, that they wanted more, more, yes, yes.

15 Q And these were Jews?

16 A From Jewish blood they took.

17 Q So did they keep them and continually draw blood from
18 them?

19 A Yes.

20 Q Is that what they did?

21 A Yes, they were feeding them very good, so they should
22 have very --

23 Q Were they in Auschwitz?

24 A Yes.

25 Q Were they in acute -- where was the ()

1 QB VII, was that --

2 A I don't know. I don't know. But I know that their
3 name was Dunz, two twins from -- they come from Bratislava,
4 from Czechoslovakia. and they were -- they were so well-fed
5 that they were sharing their food with me. I used to see them
6 -- I used to see them over the gate sometimes by () Appell
7 by counting, you know. So she would give me an extra slice of
8 bread or, you know. So they were very nice to me. I was really
9 not hungry in Auschwitz, believe it or not.

10 Q What about medical experimentation? Did you --

11 A Nothing, no.

12 Q You didn't see any of that?

13 A No.

14 Q Did you hear about it?

15 A No.

16 Q No.

17 A No. I was not there too long, that's why, maybe,
18 and, you know, maybe it was good for me, lucky for me that I
19 got hurt. So maybe that was the reason that I survived, you
20 know.

21 A VOICE: There's a question that I've wanted to ask for
22 a long time. Were you ever physically abused?

23 A No, no.

24 Q Were women or young girls raped?

25 A Not -- not according my knowledge. I never saw it.

1 I didn't see it. I only saw that one woman who had the baby, and
2 I also saw a baby was born in camp and she was -- she was able to
3 hide her pregnancy, because they always checked and they took out
4 the pregnant women and they brought them back to Auschwitz, you
5 know. But this lady, she was -- she kept her pregnancy very well-
6 hidden, and she had the baby, and I don't know how they got --
7 they got rid of the baby, but the first day -- she gave birth
8 during the night, and the first day she went back to work. Like
9 nothing would happen. And she survived.

10 Q She survived.

11 A She survived. Yes, I saw her after the war.

12 Q Tell me about after the war, after the liberation.

13 You -- where did you go?

14 A After the liberation, we made up with my family that
15 any of us will come back, we will meet back home, but Rakov that
16 time became Russia.

17 Q Who was -- who survived?

18 A Nobody.

19 Q You had a cous -- Goldie, your cousin?

20 A Goldie, yes, my niece, she survived, yes, yes. She sur-
21 vived and two of her brothers survived. And I was still sick when
22 I got home and my wound was not healed because it was very bad
23 on my arm.

24 A VOICE: Did you go back home?

25 A Yes. I went back home. I was traveling. They didn't

1 have the trains, 'cause the Russian train is a little bit wider
2 than the regular --

3 Q () trains?

4 A Yes.

5 A VOICE: The tracks?

6 A Yes. The tracks, the railroad tracks, the railroad
7 tracks. They're wider than everywhere else. From Russia. The
8 one train I had to travel on, they were delivering salt on the
9 wagons. I traveled all night till I got home.

10 Q Until you got back home. And home was a new country.

11 A Yes, I came home and that was Russia. And Goldie was
12 waiting for me there with her two brothers and I was -- I
13 didn't come home like a survivor because I had very nice clothes
14 and I came home with a suitcase. The only thing, I couldn't
15 wash and --

16 Q Where did you get a suitcase?

17 A In Germany, after the liberation, I -- there was not too
18 many of us in that city, because it was not like Buchenwald or
19 Auschwitz or Bergen-Belsen. It was Gelsenkirchen, a city. And they
20 took us to the department store and they picked out clothes. I had--

21 Q The nuns?

22 A Yes, yes. And I also went to the city hall and I made
23 sure that the city hall paid back for the hospital. For the time
24 that we were there, nobody paid for us. So I made sure that
25 the city paid back. And what's -- when I went to

1 the city hall in Gelsenkirchen, I recognized the girl from the
2 camp. She took over the city hall. She became the mayor of
3 the town, you know.

4 Q Oh my gosh. That's astonishing.

5 A Yes. She -- she was picked up, they recognized her
6 in the bunker. She was a very smart woman. And she -- when
7 there was the bombing and so many people got killed and hurt, that
8 she escaped. They couldn't keep track, you know. And she was
9 very good in German. And she escaped. She was from ()
10 But somebody recognized her in a bunker and they put her in jail.
11 And she was in jail. But they were so busy that they didn't
12 have time to transfer her to Auschwitz or to Buchenwald, and
13 afterwards, when they liberated Gelsenkirchen, she took over the
14 whole city hall.

15 Q When did you come to the States?

16 A I came to the States in 1949. July the 4th, 1949.

17 Q And why did you come here?

18 A Why I came to the United States? Well, we lived in
19 Germany, in Wasserburg.

20 Q Were you married by that time?

21 A Yes, yes.

22 Q Did you marry a survivor?

23 A I married a survivor, yes. I married when I was
24 seventeen.

25 Q Oh, my goodness. That was in 1945?

1 A 19 -- no, the beginning 1946. And I married a man,
2 also a survivor. He was twenty-two. Meyer Salzer was his name.
3 And we lived in Czechoslovakia, we got married in Czechoslovakia
4 and then we went to Germany because we were not sure where we will
5 go at that time. Either we go to Israel or we come to the
6 United States. And we registered to both places, but the United
7 States came in first, so we came to the United States.

8 Q And where did you go?

9 A We went to Los Angeles, California, and I still live
10 there.

11 Q And you had one daughter, two daughters?

12 A I had one child in Germany. This is my older daughter,
13 () And I was pregnant when we came to the United States
14 with my younger daughter, Barbara. And I have a son. He was
15 born in 1954. Ervin. Unfortunately, I lost my husband. He's
16 not with us anymore.

17 Q So what I want to ask you now, what I want to do
18 is change the tape, actually. It's a good place to stop.

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