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ESTER GOSHEN

Tape No. B-29
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1 A. My name is Ester Goshen. I live in Cleveland, Ohio. I
2 came her from Romania about 5 years ago and I was taken from
3 the ghetto of (Smalstell) in Transelvania, Romania called
4 (bitstetza).

5 I was 17 years when we were taken in the ghetto. We
6 were in the ghetto for one month and then taken to
7 Auschwitz. My whole family except my father was taken in a
8 forced labor camp to Ukraine, Russia.

9 We came to Auschwitz my mother, two other sisters and
10 two little brothers and grandparents, both grandparents and
11 aunts and uncles. We were about 70 people altogether.

12 After the first night arriving in Auschwitz, I never
13 knew what happened to my family.

14 The second day in Auschwitz, my first contact with the
15 Nazis was when they put us in an (appel) blocks and somebody
16 just shouted rules and probably most of the people didn't
17 even know what rule means and we didn't inquire. It was
18 quiet at that moment.

19 Then an SS woman came with her little dog and she
20 pointed to a Jewish girl. The dog jumped on the girl and --
21 I don't know how you say this word -- started to bite the
22 neck of the girl.

23 It was terrible cry and pain and then the SS woman took
24 the girl and she put it around the neck of the girl and took
25 her and put her on the floor away.

26 It was so saddening that I never could have believed
27 it, that can happen.

1 And they all started praying to God that at least let
2 her die; let her not be in this big pain.

3 And maybe you won't like what I will say now but this
4 is the moment when I lost my belief in God because never in
5 my life did I ask so deep in my heart that please God not
6 save her, make her not suffer.

7 And all of a sudden, I saw that God is not there and we
8 are ourselves and since then I never feel the wish to ask
9 God for help. I just realized that He isn't there and He
10 will never be in my life again.

11 Okay. What you want me?

12 Q. It's such a difficult thing. You were in the ghetto
13 for how long did you say you were in the ghetto?

14 A. It was only for one month. Before we went in the
15 ghetto, we had to wear this yellow stars and we had all the
16 time very hard times with the Hungarian people.

17 For example, once it happened I went on the street to
18 buy some food and one Hungarian woman came and spit at me and
19 she said, "You dirty Jew you got what you deserved." I can
20 never forget this either.

21 We felt we are surrounded by enemies and nobody ever
22 will be there to help us.

23 You said that you ask questions.

24 Q. What types of conversations did you have with the
25 people you were with? Were you able to talk about things or
26 were you pretty much -- you just thought about living from
27 day to day or did you talk among each other?

1 A. No. We -- At least at the beginning, when we still had
2 some human feelings we tried to be close to each other.

3 For example, when we had to march or we had to go we
4 always held hands for each other. The simple fact that we
5 held hands made us feel stronger.

6 And I had the feeling that we have there are very much
7 dirty thing around us.

8 All the Jewish women they really are very strong and
9 they do have each other just to survive and not for a moment
10 did we think that we won't survive. We knew that we will
11 have to survive. It's going to be that we will not die.

12 Q. I read an article in the paper, I think yesterday, of a
13 lady who said that there was a long period of time where she
14 didn't remember things that happened to her. Did that
15 happen to you or anybody close to you?

16 Did you remember vague, -- you know , vaguely or almost
17 everything over a period of time?

18 A. I remember a lot and I think about it a lot. But
19 somehow I want -- I want to forget even if everybody around
20 say don't forget. We have to remember. I think everybody
21 wishes to forget. Not to forgive, to forget.

22 Because our humiliation was so deep. That I don't
23 like for any human being being humiliated that way can live
24 with dignity after what's happened.

25 For example, we were once -- It was summer. I think
26 it was it in (stroodhofloger). I don't remember exactly. I
27 think it was in (stroodhofloger) we had -- it was in wheat

1 block and we had 1,000 people around and we had a (logger??)
2 it means our supervisor. She had a room in front of us and
3 she had a cat.

4 She came one day when we were exhausted and hungry and
5 thirsty. She came in and gave some milk for the cat and had
6 the cat in front of her and she started. I don't know how you
7 say that. And we could hear everytime the cat swallowed and it
8 was such.

9 I don't know how to explain that. You have to be very
10 thirsty and very hungry to understand what we felt. And it was
11 some around us who started yelling and crying, "Take her out.
12 We don't want to see." And she said, "Why? That's not a Jew.
13 That's a cat."

14 Some how she decided she's more than you are. Can you
15 understand what I meant?

16 Q. I can't understand that someone would say that.

17 A. No. Can you understand this deep humilitation what you
18 feel that somebody can put a cat above you, above you as a
19 human being.

20 The cat deserved to have milk but we Jews don't. We
21 humans don't deserve that. You don't understand.

22 Q. I don't understand how you would live with someone
23 telling you that.

24 A. Exactly.

25 Q. I don't. Because no one has ever said to me, you know,
26 anything like that at all.

27 I know I was talking with one guy who said that food --

1 I mean after a point, hunger was like the most important
2 thing to you. If you could get something to eat that was
3 what you were looking for. Did that happen to you that food
4 was like your main goal after your first few months?

5 A. No. I don't know. I -- It was very important not to
6 be hungry. It was a continual preoccupation.

7 But we had, for example, a girl who had a very
8 beautiful voice and was always singing all kinds of Jewish
9 songs and when she sang, somehow we could forget everything
10 and that made us hope a lot. She was the one. Her name was
11 Lis. I still remember her. Somehow she survived because I
12 remember again I saw her.

13 When she started singing even the coppa or even the
14 guards stopped and let her sing and they didn't hit her.
15 She did that. She sung, and she sung all the time just to
16 make them quiet down.

17 Q. They allowed you to have certain people to sing or
18 things or were you punished like other people that they
19 wanted some kind of entertainment or something. If you did
20 anything, were you punished?

21 A. Not punished for entertainment. For example, you
22 worked and you only straightened out your bed and they beat
23 us. This is not new. This everybody knows that we were
24 beated like, like -- I don't know. Animals are not beaten
25 like that.

26 I think we have human --. I never felt that we lost
27 human dignity.

1 I tell you another example. We had a coppa Polish. I
2 don't know if she was Polish or Ukranian. I think she was
3 Ukranian woman who was very, very cruel. And one time a
4 guard a Nazi guard saw her beating. She was exactly beating
5 me and the guard came and said, "Oh. Oh, okay. You beat
6 her, now give her your stick and let her beat you." To see
7 -- Just to make fun of her because she was --

8 And I was so surprised that my first instinct was to
9 tell him -- I told him, "No, I can never hit another human
10 being."

11 I'm so proud of that because this means that even this
12 woman who deserved -- Everybody started yelling, "Beat her,
13 beat her" because she was really cruel. We still had our
14 human dignity. We couldn't hit her back.

15 Q. The woman I did talked with sounded like you lost a lot
16 of this human dignity because when the war -- when the
17 liberation happened, she was one of the people that shot
18 Nazis, actually went out and just was so hurt inside that he
19 had to do violence to other people.

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. You saw those signs?

22 A. I saw those signs. Even in our logger was -- We was
23 in a logger because they took us from one logger to another
24 when the Russians came after us. We were somehow caught on
25 the road or somewhere. And really when the people, the
26 Russian brought the Nazis back to us and show them, there
27 were some who went to hit them but most of us didn't even

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want to look now.

Q. Didn't even associate --

A. No, we didn't want to. We didn't feel like. I don't know. You want to say something?

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Q. You can go ahead and continue.

A. It wasn't Rosh Hashanah. The second day when you go. I don't remember -- When you drop bread in the river to say that all your sins. Yeah. That your sins will -- You have to get rid of your sins, yeah.

Two Polish young boys came there and started to tell us what's happened to the Jews in Poland and you have to do something and save yourself and be prepared and everybody said, "No." Nobody wanted to believe that.

And what was the hardest part in our state for, before they took us in the ghetto they took almost 95% of the men and put them in labor camps. So, when we were mostly women and children. My daddy was taken and my uncles our whole family was only the old men and women and children. I forget about 80 or 90.

Q. Okay. You are talking mostly about the women and children together in the camp and the responsibilities between men and women were totally different and you know more about what happened to women. Was it different in your camp? Were there men there too or was there women?

A. I was talking about the ghetto. In loggers, we never were together with men. We didn't have -- at all. Only

1 once or twice maybe in Auschwitz we saw a man. But we
2 really didn't. We were special women in women camps.

3 Q. What happened to the men?

4 A. It was in our camp that a woman had a child. She was
5 pregnant and our doctor took her in the her in the seb. for
6 -- How you say? Sick people. But it was not really. Yeah.
7 It was infirmary. I don't know how you say it in English.

8 And she had and the child and the guard took the child
9 immediately but the woman survived. I don't know if she
10 survived the loger, but they didn't kill her because the
11 doctor -- the child was killed but the woman somehow the
12 doctor succeeded in putting her. Oh, she changed the name
13 and put name for another dead. The SS didn't check it.
14 She's dead or nothing.

15 Our doctor she was one not from my city but very close.
16 She saved a lot of lives in this way that she said she that,
17 she exchanged several. This is a woman who died who was --

18 Q. So, what if people left with a different --

19 A. We didn't have identity, just a number took out a
20 number and put another one.

21 Q. So, it was a little bit easier for them not to keep
22 track of people because they just couldn't find who a
23 particular person was.

24 A. We never, we never had a name. At least, I don't
25 remember ever we just ever having a name or being called a
26 just a name. We just had numbers. And you exchanged a
27 number. We didn't know who you are and what's happened to

1 you. It was not really a personal. Just numbers, that's
2 all.

3 Q. Describe the look of the camp like what your rooms you
4 stayed in or barracks or whatever they called them.

5 A. We were a number of about 1,000 women who were taken
6 from place to place to all my logger life to make this
7 antitank -- You know this very big holes. How you call
8 this? You know they wanted to come where the tanks come to
9 have big holes holds five and ten men stood and cover it
10 with --

11 Q. Fox holes? That's where soldiers hide in fox holes.

12 A. Yeah. Okay. Trench.

13 Q. Trench.

14 A. And they cover it with grass. We had to cover it with
15 grass so that the tank doesn't know -- They don't see it and
16 they get stuck. It was like --

17 Q. I know what you mean. It was a way of --

18 A. I can't design it for you.

19 Q. That's okay.

20 A. It's just for the enemy to mix them up to follow them
21 real fast. To stop the tanks. Yeah. I don't know.

22 Q. A lot of the people that you were in the camp with,
23 have you since seen any of those people or met any of those
24 people or know that any of them are alive?

25 A. I know that our doctor survived because after the
26 liberation the Russian -- I had some problems. We had
27 frostbite most of us and she was in hospital and she treated

1 us together with the Russian. So, she survived and she
2 helped us to get medical treatment. But no, I don't know,
3 not many.

4 Q. Frostbite was pretty much of a common thing. Did they
5 have shoes.

6 A. No, we didn't. We had some -- this wood shoes which
7 was just like you have these sandals, something like that.
8 Just cut them on the surface and wood and we had to go miles
9 and miles for our work place and we mostly went by foot and
10 you had to run fast and we almost always lost our shoes.
11 And you couldn't stop and take it back because if somebody
12 stopped then you was shot. So, we most of the time then we
13 could put on our feet when we stopped on a place.

14 Q. Did you see a lot of people when you would go to work
15 and just give up and go ahead and let themselves be shot?

16 A. Oh, yes, alot of people. It was how they call you --
17 You heard everybody said that you were a musselmann that you
18 get so weak and so -- because a musselmann too we get so
19 weak that they don't even want to fight it. They wanted to
20 die. They come and shot.

21 Q. What kept you going? What was your --

22 A. I wanted to survive. I said, what ever happened after
23 that, I don't want to die like a slave. I want to be free.
24 Just wanted to --

25 The instinct of life is so big in everybody. I can not
26 -- They didn't -- I -- We didn't know why what will be right
27 to survive. We just wanted to live and that's -- We just

1 wanted to live and -- It's not that we wanted to live, we
 2 didn't want to die and be thrown out on the ground and yeah
 3 and get stinky. It was self-preservation. I don't know.
 4 And we had -- We had Zionistic feelings. I don't know how to
 5 explain it to you. We didn't know much about this before.
 6 We knew that we had long but not much. I never was in an
 7 organization. My parents were very religious. My daddy
 8 believed that we can not go to Israel until the Messiah
 9 come. But there everybody started talking about Israel and
 10 about how it will be when we go to Israel and I tell you for
 11 example.

12 I don't remember exactly what city it was. Somewhere
 13 near Cracko -- We were taken -- It was very badly
 14 bombarded, the city and we were taken to clean up the rubble
 15 in the city and this girl I told you she sings so beautiful.
 16 She started singing the Eretz Israel Heilig Land. I don't
 17 know if you heard that. And she started teaching us this
 18 song that we would like to be like -- You don't -- didn't
 19 hear this song.

20 Mir volten like feigelach bazetzer

21 die land with our trehren tsu . . .

22 You know this Yiddish. Okay. Let's try from the beginning.

23 Eretz yisroel heilig land oy vie mir

24 dich denken fur dir mir volten gezehn

25 vie amal in glantz und fire un a tsut.

26 Mir volten zoy vie shtegelach . . .

27 But what is the nice idea here is that with all tears we

1 want to irrigate the land that it will grow and make us.

2 This is I think it make us the food and to give us
3 life. I don't know exactly what the words are. But I am
4 sure this is.

5 Okay. And we sung this song going to work because the
6 SS always told us to sing. But they didn't know what we are
7 singing. And then somebody started telling us you know that
8 we went in a statle -- which is Jewish Rineland the Germans
9 pronounce it Uedenrine -- and we sung our song about our
10 Israel in this city.

11 And this make us feel good that we are still alive and
12 that we are singing and that they don't even know that we
13 are singing Jewish songs.

14 We felt that we will try. We make fun of them because
15 if they would have known what we are singing then they would
16 have shot us or whatever.

17 Q. So, when things went on in your head dreaming about
18 things that would happen when this was over with, that's
19 another thing that kept you going? What did you think about
20 while you were working? What kind of things went through
21 your head?

22 A. I don't know. I don't know exactly what you want to
23 ask me.

24 Q. Like when I'm sitting waiting for a class or something
25 and I daydream about things. What went in your mind, while
26 you were working? Get me out of this place or my friend
27 over here is not feeling well? What kinds of things went

1 through your head?

2 A. Okay. The first of all was not to work too hard and to
3 watch the SS that he doesn't see you. Because if you
4 straighten up, then he will beat you.

5 So, first of all -- I told you we did this digging. We
6 digged. They told us this is how much you have to do
7 everyday and if we didn't do it we had to stay. But even if
8 we did if he only saw you standing up because you were
9 tired, you couldn't do it.

10 We were hungry and tired and sick and cold and if you
11 stood up for a moment then SS, not the the SS, the capos.
12 The SS was just watching and standing there.

13 They beat you. They had very big always sticks and
14 whips and they hit you with feet and the end was even harder
15 because they took this Hitler youth, the young SS boys and
16 every three woman had a boy to 12 years or 13 years.

17 You believe in children, that's what they did. And
18 this young boys, children they would be so cruel. They
19 would hit us like they wouldn't hit their dogs, but they hit
20 us and it was --

21 What was in our mind just to make it that they don't
22 see you that you stand.

23 We were for example, we stand like that and making like
24 that we are working. Just first most important thing is to
25 get out of being hit and tell everybody when somebody is
26 coming.

27 We had, for example, a very long row and then he went

1 away somebody yelled and they told one to another to tell
2 now still stand and then somebody came then who saw first
3 will tell us go on because they are coming.

4 And we watched, all of us, like one person about each
5 other. Every woman when you could stay mental as we will
6 survive more and more. And more and this was the most
7 important thing to get -- not to get beaten because it was
8 terrible after because you had wounds which would never heal
9 when you were beaten or scratches. All kinds.

10 They came to your face and beat you or put the dogs on
11 you and you wanted not because everything would be in fact,
12 everything would -- won't help you to survive.

13 And then the second very big thing was that we didn't
14 have any possibilities to clean, to wash.

15 And, for example, we get our morning coffee. It was
16 black water but it was coffee. It was warm and it was
17 liquid. And I had one friend, we were very, very good
18 friends -- she was a girl from Germany -- and she taught me
19 that you can take the coffee in your mouth, hold it there
20 for a while just to feel that you are wet and then spit your
21 coffee and wash your hands and all of a sudden you will feel
22 -- you will feel very clean and civilized. And I never
23 could do that.

24 When I had the coffee in my mouth, I had to swallow it.
25 I couldn't. She was always so strong. She showed me, look
26 I take it and then she had it in her mouth. I couldn't do
27 that and she would give me her drop of coffee to wash my

1 hand.

2 It was months and months we didn't have a toothbrush.
3 We didn't have to wash our teeth or to wash. We didn't have
4 hair. It was no problem. To wash -- our clothes is all.
5 Nothing. We had. This was not. But we had under the arms
6 and all over the body all kinds of -- I don't know -- lice
7 or how you.

8 Q. Did they ever take you in like a place and shower
9 everyone or was that like a real rare thing to do?

10 A. We had outside the camp that we were was a river and
11 once or twice they took us. But this was even worse because
12 they put us always to stay in, to stay naked and after we
13 showered they took away the people who were already.

14 We were more scared of that. This was like the
15 selection. People who looked too skinny and too worn out
16 they would take them and we never saw them again.

17 So, at least we had this water but it was months and
18 months and you never could wash, not even -- In winter, we
19 had the snow we washed our hands. In summer, it was almost
20 impossible.

21 But we went out to these fields always in digging and
22 sometimes we found potatoes and since like there's a
23 population put it there for us but it wasn't very, very
24 often.

25 And we washed our hands with -- How do you say this?
26 With the ground, with the dirt of the ground -- it's clean
27 -- on our body.

1 Q. Did you ever, other than the one instance, where you
2 said the guard said to you to beat this woman, did you ever
3 see times when the prisoners were treated nicely by the SS
4 or the guards in the camp? Was it always -- It's so hard
5 for me to believe that people were so cruel. Was there ever
6 a moment when you felt like they weren't so cruel or one
7 person in particular that they were scared of not showing
8 that they were so cruel?

9 A. No. I think they didn't even consider us human being.
10 My surprise, big surprise was once we had one SS guard they
11 called Arunkle. This is from Hungarian like gold. Goldie.
12 Like this name Goldie in Yiddish. Because, I don't know why
13 he got this name. He had some gold teeth or something.
14 When he laughed, it looked like --.

15 And he was standing guard when all of a sudden he gets
16 a message, he gets a letter and he said, "Oh, my wife had
17 two boys!" And it was nobody around to say and he said it
18 to us. "And now I am a father."

19 It was the first time when the SS somehow felt we were
20 human beings and he wanted to share with us and he was
21 happy. This was only time.

22 Q. They didn't -- They just looked at you and --

23 A. No. They would never talk to us. Not even look at us.
24 They would never look at our face.

25 Once there was an SS woman who I was -- I had -- I was
26 how you say specially punished because -- I don't know what
27 I did -- and this -- I was taken out in front -- This SS

1 woman saw me and I think that she wanted -- she felt somehow
2 I looked so little and so young that she felt somehow very
3 sorry about what's happen and she ask me one day that, "Look
4 you are a little girl and I want to give you something.
5 What would you want?" I told her a toothbrush. This was
6 one -- She was not -- She was in the kitchen. She was
7 doing for the SS cooking and she once gave me a sandwich a
8 piece of bread with butter.

9 So, this was a human and I accepted it from her with
10 even though she was a Nazi.

11 Later on, for example, I don't feel good and I was not
12 invited and I say I don't want bread from a Nazi but I
13 accept it. So, this is about two times when I can tell you
14 about.

15 Q. You said at one particular time that you were
16 especially tortured. What did they do other than beat you?

17 A. You want to know it exactly? Okay. I stole an onion
18 from the kitchen, from the SS kitchen. They had all kinds
19 of vegetables outside and we always went through, through
20 that and because they saw me they -- it was winter, it was
21 December the 24th. This is so personal. I don't want --

22 Q. Okay. That's fine. You don't have to tell me that. I
23 know lots of things happen to people that I'm sure they
24 would not want to tell anyone.

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