

HOLOCAUST MEDIA PROJECT

Interview of Max and Esther Greitzer

(Note: All words in parentheses are phonetic.)

Tape begins: Interviewing Max Greitzer and Esther Greitzer about survival of the Holocaust.

Q You might want to start out by just telling me first when you first felt something was wrong and what went on in your mind. What was your first impressions of "your life was in danger and you had to do something special to survive"?

Max: It was in the camp you mean?

Q Before the camp. Before you were picked up --

Max: Oh.

Q -- or anything. When did --

Max: This was a (pe-shah-na-rob-er-o), 1940. This was the end after two -- a couple months when they was -- occupied Poland. That took -- middle the night they took me out in the back. Took me in a Jewish labor camp. This was in (Ahn-a-belt), Germany.

Q Where were you in Poland?

Max: (Sof-er-ez). And we was working there. They made a highway. Was not too many food. This time was the parents was doing (forn). Sometime we -- they send us a package. We could receive the first days. After the -- everything finish, we couldn't send nothing. They couldn't send us. We was there maybe a year. Another work and they send us in another camp, (Bo-ge-leen). This was (o-sa), a railroad; we was working on railroads. Was very bad, I mean because there -- much -- too many people was killed because when we picked up the railroads -- I mean the lines --

Q The rails.

Max: The rails --

Esther: The rails.

Max: They lost -- they didn't have -- the power was something they knocked -- people -- lot of peoples became without legs (indecipherable). After we're -- after this we went -- they send us to (O-ber-link), was (Moss-el-isk), (Voice-moss-el-vitz); this was a very bad camp. It was working also on railroad. The kapos and the (form-ers), the Germans was beating us and everything; was very bad. We was there -- I don't remember how many months after they send us to (Voice-moss-el-vitz). (Voice-moss-el-vitz) was a camp; this was a hole like this. Was a -- just (sam-min) there, whole building. In the night when -- lot of people came together. Everything was sweating. The beds were closed on top. It was (ok-en-vac) because too many people.

Q I'm sorry, it was what? I didn't understand.

Max: Vat. Was from the steam came out --

Q Where?

Max: -- because it was -- like rain.

Esther: Dripping --

Max: Dripping.

Q From the perspiration of people?

Max: Yeah.

Esther: Yeah.

Max: Yeah, so many people. This was out (shin-ba-tone), out

(bid-ding). And there was a job what we did, the skis and the --

Esther: (Indecipherable)

Max: No, the -- sent to Germany -- to Russia, because that time was in 1941, was the war with the Russia. They send us to made the -- in Russia the -- the lines smaller, because in Russia the --

Esther: The railroad.

Max: -- the railroad tracks --

Q Narrower?

Max: Wider.

Esther: Wider.

Max: This was wider. And once a day they gave us a little soup; no showers. The shower was a cold barrack in the middle in the yard. We has to dress in the room, in the cold rooms because was cold to go out, because the lice was eating us. We was -- the lice we was pulling like this, so many lice was. In that time I was supposed to go the second transport to Russia for this job. Meanwhile, we was working there loading the skis on the platforms. And I -- came from Russia and they became sick, a typhus they had because was very bad conditions. And they came to us with the typhus; lot of people became sick in (os-a) and this was -- this camp we was there, I don't remember how long. They send us to (Mark-sha). (Mark-sha) was also a Jewish camp because there were a lot of -- thousands of people --

Q (Inaudible)

Max: No. We was there. We was working all kind works, build-

ings and -- I'm a painter; I was working painting. The conditions was bad all over. We was there a couple of years; I don't know how long, two years maybe. They send us (Obeer+sau-tin). They send us in another -- in a concentration camp. This is -- we was going (indecipherable) in this camp. We was marching from this camp to this camp. It was snowing and we -- on the road was lot of people dying from starvation (indecipherable). We came to concentration camp (indecipherable). We was working in a factory from (kluke), a factory in ammunition. And what I going to tell you is this was very bad. We was there to the Russians start to bombard this camp, (Oh-kine-is). See, this was around Breslau. From this camp they put us on railroad car -- wagons, and (indecipherable) from --

Esther: Like house -- house --

Max: Freight, freight --

Q Right, just --

Max: Car, yeah, they send us --

Esther: Cable, here.

Max: -- to Buchenwald. In Buchenwald they bombard -- the Allies, and we couldn't go -- they kepted us in the camp -- before the camp because you has to take showers. As we came in this camp, lot of people was dying from starvation because they didn't have food and anything. That we came to Buchenwald we saw how the people -- the (cahm-a-chaus) was working. And people was working by this camp and the (cahm-a-chaus) was -- was on the wagons, put the

dead people back and forth. And this was there the camp what was -- we was there not too long because the -- this was maybe the end from the war. They send us on the road. We went to -- nighttime we was walking and daytime we was staying in the forest. And food that they give to us after two days maybe are (indecipherable) potatoes. This was too -- We was free. And the -- when I was there was (zeeg-mar-ine-gang), was the French came in. We was free.

Q Okay, I want to repeat again the question at the beginning. I mean I'm very glad you went through that --

Max: Sure, sure.

Q -- but first of all --

Max: I make this short because in English I'm not so perfect.

Q That's all right; you're doing fine. In the very beginning before you were even picked up in the night, first: How old were you when you were picked up?

Max: Oh, I was twenty-three.

Q Before you were picked up in the night, did you suspect anything was happening? What did you know was going on? What did people talk about?

Max: They took -- they know -- we knew that they're taking people to Germany for work. What kind work, what the conditions, we didn't know. Everybody was thinking maybe I wouldn't go because the Jewish police, was our Judenrat -- You know? A Judenrat, this was like a Jewish committee. And there was working the rich people what gave money, so he didn't go for awhile. They took the

poorer guys, you know; this was the conditions. After while everybody went.

Esther: Oh, he didn't meant this.

Max: Yeah, sure.

Esther: He meant when the German came in, how we feel. You have this human --

Q I was -- what he was saying, I wanted to know what went on in his mind, what people talked about before they were picked up. In other words, people must have said, "Something's going on that we don't understand."

Max: Yes, we know that this is no good, that they're taking to Germany. We know that what's going on; exactly we didn't know yet. We know that this the conditions in Germany is bad and everything. That's why we was trying not to go, but you couldn't -- they took me out in the bed, also. Who had money more --

Esther: Stayed longer.

Max: -- stays a little longer, how long is possible. After, they took everybody. And meanwhile when -- right away when they came in, they took us, whole convoys. Every day you has to go to clean the streets and everything.

Esther: When the German came in, in our town, they right away (dis-start-to-heed) -- to beat up us and they killed people with all kind stuff.

Max: They grabbed once my father right away when they come in and they took him in a camp there in the city (Sos-on-vitz) and

they beat him up so much. He came home and he was swollen.

Q He was what?

Esther: Swollen.

Max: Swollen from the beating-up. That's all what we know. We know that is no good.

Q Did you two know each other before?

Max: Yeah, I know her because she's a cousin.

Q What -- give me some indication of what went on in your mind over the years; what was your thinking? What was your thoughts to yourself? What did you think about survival? What did you think about life? What did you think about --

Max: About the food, what we was eating, what we didn't eat, because we always was hungry. Always we was dreaming about food. We didn't care what's going to be. We knew that it's going to be -- we wouldn't survive, everybody.

Esther: Because they took, you know, to the crematories, every day went [Ed: perhaps "transports"] (towns-pos). Where he was was worse than me, much worse.

Max: I was just lucky because I'm a painter and I was working in the factory (indecipherable) and the boss in the painting was a German from (indecipherable); he was a nice guy. He didn't look [Ed: probably meaning "observe"] too much, you know, because a shop on the [Bow-er-au], where the factory is we had a -- the painters had a shop. We went to the shop. We could rest up. We could wash out the clothes a little, what mean (vash). We cooked out. We had a stove and we cooked our --

Esther: (Boy-ee, boy-ee.)

Max: We boiled out our supper.

Esther: Because the lice --

Max: Because the lice was eating. This wasn't -- And he didn't look so much. He didn't push us. On the job was kapos with everything so he didn't -- he was -- he couldn't do nothing, but when we came in the shop he was the boss.

Esther: He didn't look too good, you know.

Max: That's why I survived.

Q What did prisoners talk about among themselves? What discussion was there?

Max: Everybody was thinking about food.

Q All day, all night --

Max: That's right --

Q -- that's all they talked about --

Max: That's right --

Q -- is where is --

Max: -- because we knew we going to not survive, because how -- we saw every day they took up -- when people would -- became sick and they took him -- another (indecipherable) which means like a --

Esther: Like in a hospital, you know --

Max: In a hospital they had there. He didn't came out there -- from there. The SS came and they took right away to Auschwitz.

Q Esther, do you want to add some things about your experiences?

Esther: You see, I been -- I'm from (Ahl-kush). I been till '42.

The fall I went to concentration was that cold. (Indecipherable), you know, like a Wednesday, the German took all Jews in one spot, you know? And look what you had --

Max: A gulag, that is --

Esther: Not a gulag. This is when --

Max: Oh, oh, on the --

Esther: -- on a Wednesday -- (tape interrupted, perhaps turned off, then continuing:) Like by us the time, you know, like we was -- from hide, from cows, the skin, hide. Hide, you call, yeah?

Q Hide, yeah.

Esther: We was buying; we was selling. And we was, you know -- like in the basements we had -- in the (indecipherable), the hide that they want to take my father, but my brother didn't let. And the younger brother, they took him to cover my father, you know, but they beat him so hard and they sent him to Sosnowiecz, also, and they kept him then. And one time, you know, they took our older brother -- not older to me, younger, because somebody --

Max: Squealed.

Esther: -- I don't -- (ye-mahs-a) --

Max: Squealed, squealed on him because he was doing a little blackmarket because he has to survive; he has to do something. They catch him and they hanged him.

Esther: And they sent him -- before they sent him to the (cold-missile-vitz), you know.

Max: In the jail.

Esther: In a jail. And then they came more people. He was one -- I heard, I don't know, one in a cell, not allowed to sleep, just you have your hours; you have to walk the whole day. That's what I heard -- they said. And (pe-mi\$ssile-witz) took him away to (Shan-uf) and then they hang him in a (par-der) with five to six (hunds, bait-yas) and he was the only one, my brother, because we knew who gave them out to the SS -- not the SS, I don't -- the German --

Max: (Out-her-ker-y) --

Esther: Police, with everything, you know. And he yelled out because I was (con-shan) with the girls in concentration camp. And I heard my name and they told me what happened to my brother, that he the only -- was a older man with a (par-don-mit-schans) and he says --

Q Okay, you want to stop for a second?

Esther: I wasn't -- but this -- but the girls told me in concentration camp is here (wood-ahp) (indecipherable), because he knew what's going on, my brother. He knew that they hang him. And the father with the sons, he didn't knew it. And he says, "In case my father will not take (zuk-man, de-coom-er) --

Max: Avenge.

Esther: -- and this person, he maybe will (ats-bet-a-det). And then other brotherII have also in Auschwitz. They hang him, also, other brother. And I survived. The first brother they hang when

we was new in (Al-kush). Three weeks before there was, you know, the whole -- there was Judenreine, they took all --

Max: They send our Jews from the whole town.

Q What sort of blackmarket activity were --

Esther: He was -- not me, just light kettle. Light kettle.

Q Light kettle?

Esther: Kettle, yeah. You know, we was the Third Reich. Also was the border. And then (did-na-beloan) the German was, also, at our town. But by us was the Third Reich, the --

Max: The major holocaust.

Esther: -- border from the German, you know? And they has the border. And there the border did the kettle, but they didn't brought the kettle. They hire Polish people and they brought home and what they took. The brother is from the house. They didn't caught him. They didn't caught the brother.

Max: So somebody knew there was something.

Esther: You see, that's why they took us. And I went to the concentration camp and there was, you know, all Jewish -- Jews they took out from the whole town; Judenereine, they call it. Three weeks after they hang the first brother. And they took us (Bernsto, Sudeten-gow). This was in forty-second, nineteen forty-second.

Q '42?

Esther: Yeah, '42. I said forty-second. When we came in this concentration camp, there was -- wasn't a concentration camp, just was a working camp, just for women. There was already girls there.

I can't recall how much there was, but after a year, in '43, they took us -- you know, we thought something fishy goes on. We didn't know what. They didn't took us -- before, we was living in the factory. We was spinning, you know, like from raw material we was making cotton. And from the cotton there was the bed-like material, you know, also. But not just material but the yard-like, you know.

Q Like cloth?

Esther: Not regular -- was cloth, but not the good one, you know, because that was from paper. I don't know what they made. But one day they didn't took us to the work. Was something going on (feeks), something -- we didn't know what going on. Meantime they took us. They (lag-e-teering) everything. This -- and there was the Gestapos and the SS. Of the men we have to undress like we was naked, you know. We was -- have to stay in the front and the back. And there was right and left. A couple people they want sent to death who didn't -- because they was like skeletons, you know. And then this was the concentration camp. Then the SS men came, ready everything, SS women. In the beginning was working with all kind German women together. Later when they start the concentration camp, they dressed in --

Max: German girls was working (inaudible) by SS.

Esther: And they was wearing like soldiers, like --

Max: SS.

Esther: -- (inaudible) how we call, the clothes, you know. And

they was very strict to us, very. They took us to the work and from the work, but we had a very good (lag-u-teerl-ya).

Q Good what?

Esther: (Lag-u-teer-ism).

Max: She was not bad.

Esther: The main, you know, SS woman, they call the (lag-e-teer-an), you know, the main, the head. She says, "Girls, you watch out for the SS women, but me, don't be afraid. You can steal; you can everything do it, but watch out for them. In case they come to me, complain, I have to punish you." One time she gave me this -- and this I got (spoon-up) because they called me. I steal, you know, like potatoes, with everything. But that's -- you know, she was very good. I was working with spin -- (spin-er-eye), you know, they spin, and after the work always they took me -- when not in the factory, they took me to the kitchen to peel potatoes, help them, and I have, you know, more food. Wasn't too bad by us. But are a couple people passed away, too, who couldn't survive it, who couldn't manage, you know. And May the 9th, '45, the Russian free us. And then I went home to Sosnowiecz to look who got left, somebody survived. Two brothers with a sister survived. And one brother I heard he passed away three weeks after the concentration camp, after the war. He was free, but he got very sick. He start to eat, you know. He didn't watch himself, young fellow, and he passed away. That's what I find. And we met and we got married. Then we came here.

Q Now, how has your life been now after all this experience?

What has been the basic thing that's helped you to recover?

Max: All these dreams, dreams, bad dreams, that's all.

Esther: Very -- you know -- not --

Max: Always some yelling the middle the night.

Esther: Dreams, you know, they're coming to take us, you know, and we're very nervous, you know.

Max: Yeah, I forgot to mention I lost my whole family. I survive it --

Esther: And a sister.

Max: -- and a sister. We was six kids and the parents.

Q You're the only survivor?

Esther: With his sister.

Max: With a sister.

Esther: A sister.

Max: One sister.

Esther: One sister.

Max: Yeah.

Esther: We went through plenty; plenty, believe me. Nobody can believe.

Q Why do you think you survived and other people didn't? What was the thing?

Max: Because -- I meantioned because we had --

Q Painter?

Max: -- the painter; the boss was not so bad. That's why. And

you could wash your shirt and sometime he was bringing a potato, so just keeps you.

Q And you also had a good -- or a person who wasn't too bad supervising you?

Esther: No.

Q Was that important to your survival?

Max: Sure.

Esther: You know, everybody (indecipherable) to survive, to see to -- other people survive (indecipherable), survive.

Q What did you talk about to other women, to other girls? What were your conversations?

Esther: I tell the true, I don't remember because by us wasn't too bad. Was not too bad. Like I told you before, I manage, and sometimes, you know, they gave us a little more because I help out in the kitchen. Then I went in the basements to pick the potatoes, always you manage to (stick-o-er-be), you know. You have to watch out for the SS; they should not catch you.

Q Is there anything else either one of you would like to mention before we end the interview?

Max: I mean, what to mention, thanks God they lost the war. They not -- nobody would be alive from the Jewish people. Thanks to our Allies and, the most important, United States. We came here. The first times was not so easy, but we picked up; we made a living. Thanks God.

Esther: We have the professional children, thanks God.

Q What sort of work did you do here, painting?

Esther: Painting.

Max: Painting. Now I'm retired.

Esther: I did not work because I raised two children. Thanks God I have very well educated children. I'm proud of them.

Q Okay, that --

Esther: Very proud of them.

Q Okay, that ends the interview with Max and Esther Greitzer. This is Ken Rothschild, the interviewer. Thank you very much.

Max: Thank you.

-End-