

Interpreter (I): I've already started, okay

I: So umm..

I: If you could say, Mr. Mandelbaum, what would you like to know?

Elliot Perlman (EP): Mr. Mandelbaum, thank you. Could you tell us please your full name in Polish and then in Yiddish.

I: Mr. Mandelbaum would like to start.

I: What do you need? You need everything from the beginning, you know, the pre-war life to the end or you need just the stay in the camp.

EP: There are certain specific things I'd like and then if we have more, I'll go wider.

I: We shouldn't skip, we shouldn't jump

EP: Oh, okay.

I: We should probably, we should start from the beginning.

I: When Mr. Mandelbaum starts, he will talk til the end.

EP: Oh, so I can't ask questions?

I: Everything depends upon us, so you can ask questions.

EP: Ok, then, should I start with the...with the...

I: Ok, ok, so we'll start...

I: I do think that we'll, we'll start at the beginning—family, names, dates of birth, and so...

EP: But I just don't want to run out of time before we get to the Sonderkommando.

I: We won't.

I: You're kind of a _____ of a tape, so you can just ask the questions and Mr. Mandelbaum will answer.

EP: Straight into the Sonderkommando?

I: You can start wherever.

EP: Ok. Firstly, just....

I: What would you like to know about pre-war times?

EP: Is there a time limit on that?

I: Nine hours.

EP: Ok, well if that's the case, then we can go through chronologically. What is his full name in Polish and Hebrew or Yiddish?

I: He was born...His name is Henryk Mandelbaum and he was born on Dec. 15, 1922 in Alcoos, it's near Krakow and he comes from a Jewish family with many children. He was their oldest child in the family. The father was a butcher. When he was four, they moved to Zakowice, near Benzin and then he established his business, his father's butchery.

EP: His fathers. And school?

I: School? Because before the war there was a pretty hard time and people were without a job, with unemployment so many people took the meat from his father on that. So his father just had to shut down the company, they were bankrupt and he, as the eldest of the family, of the children, he had to help his siblings. When the, during the vacation time, he went to farmers to work on the fields, you know, doing all this farm work around. He went to the train tracks to collect the coal from the tracks. He had good friends and he had friends who found a job for him in the stone yard, Domneska Stoney and worked there for 1941-1942.

EP: 1931?

I: 1941.

EP: So the war was already on.

I: Yes. At the same time, 1941-1942 they were moved out and sent to the ghetto. In the ghetto he worked for a German company, a building which...a construction company which built the houses, made the renovations, and stuff like that.

EP: Which ghetto?

I: So, uh, working in the ghetto, he used to have a special passport for most of this work was done outside of the ghetto, that's why he knew about the existence of Auschwitz, he didn't want to tell the story about Auschwitz to his parents because his parents would be very...

EP: Distressed.

I: Distressed

EP: Which ghetto?

I: Ghetto Dombrowa-Nowicka

EP: When did he go into that ghetto?

I: 1942. They went to the ghetto in 1942. They were expelled near the villages and the towns and taken to the ghetto.

EP: What was happening between September '39 and going into the ghetto?

I: Just like everything around the house. Just like hauling stones to build the roads, just like everything they used to do around the...still he did everything to help the family. So he used to work in the ghetto from 1941 to October/November 1943. So in 1943, in October/November, they were all expelled from the Dombrowa-Nowicka ghetto to the central ghetto in Sosnowiec.

EP: Just one question. How many children in his family; He was the eldest.

I: Two sisters and one brother. One of his sisters is living in another country.

EP: All the family went to the ghetto—the first one and the second one?

I: They used to be all together. So he escaped from the transport to ghetto in Sosnowiec because he knew what was going to be, that he was a _____ and he escaped through SA man. So he escaped the SA man to the _____, that was like a paramilitary organization in Germany before the war and then occupied territories and he went to him because they lived in Dombrowa, there was a street and on the other side of the street there was a house and when the SA man was going out to work in the morning, he always welcomed him, saying goodbye, good morning, how are you and something like this, so he was very kind. He always answered and he saw that Mr. Mandelbaum always had a strong _____ but always answered. He was a good man, just after he escaped, the first _____ he makes to him.

EP: Um... how old was he at this time?

I: 18/19 years old. So he shot like a bullseye because....they gave him a living quarters on the second floor of their house, it was not finished yet and the wife of this SA officer brought him food, using the ladder.

EP: Secretly.

I: Secretly, of course.

EP: And who knew he was a Jew, how many people?

I: Only him and the family of the SA man. Two persons, he, the SA man, his wife, and Mr. Mandelbaum. No one knows. So after five, six weeks, Mr. Mandelbaum was invited to the supper with them and they prepared a table with a lot of the food and the wife was on the left side of the table, someone was sitting on the right side and Mr. Mandelbaum was sitting in the center. And, um.. they had no children so they were just they and they started looking for each other and he saw that they really wanted to tell him something and that evening they said that he must find another place to live because they are going to finish this second floor. They wanted to....so he couldn't live there anymore. So he said thank you.

EP: I need to have the dates again, because I am losing track of exactly when this is...

I: Uh, it was the end of 1943 and the beginning of 1944.

EP: And where had his parents and other siblings gone?

I: So, the parents and the siblings, except of the sister, probably were passed away, probably were murdered.

EP: Where?

I: Probably died in Auschwitz.

EP: When was that second ghetto with his family liquidated?

I: It could happen just like a few days after arrival at the ghetto because they were just concentrating more people before they send them to the Nazi death camp. Those were the Final Solution so they probably didn't spend too much time in the ghetto.

EP: Ok.

I: So they were doing this all the time, with the transports, they were just concentrating in the central ghetto, like from Dombrowa, and the other ghettos and then almost immediately they were sent to Auschwitz, they were like a receiving place, concentration, and then a larger transport could be sent to the Nazi death camp. They couldn't spend too much time over there.

EP: In the ghetto.

I: In the ghetto.

EP: All right, so we're back to the end of '43, the beginning of '44 and this couple had asked Mr. Mandelbaum to leave. Please continue.

I: So there were many...his father had many people who knew him before he...you know, so the people in the villages near by knew him, so he had a lot of places to go. Before the war, when his father still had a butchery so when he bought a cow or any cattle, he sent Henryk to bring the animals to the butchery. So that's why he had known a lot of his father's people and he still knows a lot of friends...If we have the time so we would be able to see around...

EP: A break?

I: Show you the stone yard?

EP: Oh, yes, that would be great. So Mr. Mandelbaum trusted the people that knew him and his family?

I: So he trusted them and he went to them, he was living in _____ for a week or more because he is going to Auschwitz or to Germany, or to other places, so after a week everyone is asking where have you been, how are you, are you mad or something like this. So the people really liked Mr. Mandelbaum. So he was like a leader of the group, of the boys.

EP: So he didn't experience much or any anti-semitism before the war.

I: There was anti-semitism, but they didn't experience.

EP: He didn't experience.

I: He didn't experience. He just made an example where if his colleague had told him you Jew, so probably who he would have been hit, but because...

EP: Henryk would have hit him.

I: Yeah, would have hit him. Yeah, but there was nothing like this, there was just.... When he was young he used to be very strong, so he didn't let anybody get off on him. You know, people like him, because other people visited his parents, coffee, tea, friends meetings. We'll continue.

He felt strange when he came to them because he had nothing, no money, so he is trying to figure out what to do. So he figured out that those who live in the ghetto, they would have needed some food, so he took from the ghetto some of the things that were not needed by the people anymore—some clothes, some underwear, you know...and for the money he got selling this clothes and these other things that were not needed by the Jews in the ghetto anymore, he brought them food—sugar, meat, potatoes, vegetables, whatever.

EP: So he was bringing food back, sneaking, smuggling it into the ghetto.

I: That's right. He didn't look like, like Jew, and that's why we talked about he has a photograph from that time with his friends, and you wouldn't recognize who the Jews is, how the hair. So he had a nice clothing down and a briefcase and he need to go by tramway four stops and then a distance from the stop to the ghetto. So he stood on the stop once and was just waiting for the tramway and was just looking around and on the opposite side of the street there was a small hill and he was just looking up on the left, on the right side, he was just waiting for the tramway. And suddenly there was a meeting, a face-to-face, and he noted his colleague from the same parish and they attended the school together and they had been watching each other, they had been looking at each other and then after two, three minutes, he suddenly disappeared, his colleague disappeared. He's been still waiting for the tramway, seven minutes maybe, and suddenly a tall, well-dressed man with a dog, big dog approached him and arrested him. Without the dog, he probably would have escaped.

EP: This man, he was German, the man with the dog who arrested him?

I: He was Polish. So the colleague reported against Henryk and this man who was a German or a Polish-German, and he was afraid of the dog, it was a really big dog, and his thoughts were that there must be somehow he can get out.

EP: Again, this man with the big dog, was he a civilian?

I: A civilian, but a German or Polish-German.

EP: Right, okay, so. And the colleague, had he gone to school with Henryk?

I: School. Mm-hmm.

EP: And he knew him from the area, from the neighborhood, okay. So this man with the big dog arrested him, and what happened then?

I: And he took him to the criminal police so he during his interrogation he was asked by the investigators where he had been all this time, where he had hidden, and of course Henryk knew he couldn't tell the truth because so many people had done so good for him, risking their lives so he couldn't betray them. So he, they didn't believe him, so they told Mr. Henryk to get undressed and he was just in his underwear and told him to go and they put him a stick between his elbows and knees and so he was bowed and his head was down to the ground and he was beaten.

EP: These police, German, Polish, German?

I: German. They were German police. He had to tell them something. So he told them that he had been in this old castle that was ruined and there were just a few small quarters where he could stay. So he had found this castle before when he was bringing the cattle home to his father's butchery so he was not going on the main road, he was just going on the fields and that's why he knew where the castle was.

EP: Okay. So did they believe this?

I: So after the torture he was taken to the cell and after four days they asked him once again tell us the truth. And he said I told you the truth. If you don't believe, you will be able to get there and to check the place. And they didn't want to go. So he was put in the cell for another few days and from the prison he was taken to Gestapo, to Sosnowiec and they asked all the same questions, where have you been for so long time. Where have you been hiding for a long time.

EP: How long had it been?

I: And he told the Gestapo the same what he told to the criminal police. If you don't want to believe, you can go up there. They didn't want to. And _____ hit in the face. He had been waiting for two hours and then they brought the car and then he was taken to prison in Austro-Gorczna street in Sosnowiec, the second, on the fourth floor. So when he came to the cell there had already been five Jews and ten Poles. But there were those Poles were older, they were thirty, twenty-eight or thirty years old.

EP: He knew the one cell.

I: In one cell. So he was thrown in the cell that in the prison they concentrated in small transports, twenty persons who were then sent to Auschwitz.

EP: Who would be.

I: Who were sent, would be sent to Auschwitz.

EP: Right.

I: Maybe after a week. And after about a week, they were brought by the car, by the truck for the prisoners, directly to Auschwitz, to Birkenau, to _____, so when they came to Solonow, they were waiting for a physician, for a doctor. It's lasted twelve, maybe, hours, so the physician, when he came, he just showed one hand, six Jews to the left, and the rest of the Poles, ten Poles, to the right. So they were taken then to the kleidunscamera, to the clothes warehouse, so that had the shelves, and clothes were put on there. So they had to wear brown clothes. So they were taken and they were receiving the clothes and he was the third and he didn't see what the first guys had received but he just walked to the front and looked deeper and got a shirt with no collar and then the trousers, when one sleeve was larger and one leg was longer, one was shorter and he said how, how do I look like, I'm going to look very funny because he was thinking just like a free man and because he didn't expect, he still had no idea about the real life in the camp.

EP: So at this stage, he didn't know about, like, extermination.

I: He knew, but he didn't know what is the life in the camp, why people got so funny clothes, so he was just supposed to find out soon what life in the concentration camp was life.

EP: But he went to Birkenau straight away.

I: Yeah.

EP: And what did he think was going to happen?

I: They thought about the worst. It was a death camp. So he expected the worst. So like, now, he said now that Auschwitz and Birkenau were a total difference between the camps. Why, because Auschwitz I looked like a camp for the business, for the commissions like the Red Cross would come, so it was nice to show the nice buildings which used to be before the war, army barracks. And Birkenau was everything like makeshift. You could see the quarantine....So when he was still in the warehouse with the clothes he really wanted to get better clothes because he was afraid about the way that he looked like and he asked whether he could get better clothes to the man behind the small window and the man was very rude and he told him that you are, he just insulted Mr. Mandelbaum, so he did not think too much but he just hit him and the man fell on the banks, on the shelves behind, screaming WAA, help me please, and then he disappeared and in a moment a kapo came, Fritz, and he just like he had a look on Mr. Mandelbaum from the palms to the very top.

EP: From his feet to the top of his head?

I: From his feet to the top of his head and the oberkapo said "Be careful" just like he tried to, you know, just be careful, don't do it again, because you just want to keep him, just give him advice what to do the camp. So after they got the clothes, they had to _____.

EP: Now, the first man Mr. Mandelbaum hit, he was a Jew?

I: He doesn't know.

EP: And the second man, this Fritz, he was a Jew?

I: So the Fritz, the Oberkapo Fritz, he was a German.

EP: He was an SS man.

I: No, oberkapo, he was a kapo, he was a functionary person.

EP: So then the tattoo?

I: And he was so curious, he was watching how others were tattooed before him and then when the man started to tattoo him, he made him big numbers on his arm. So he said just make them small numbers for me. He made the small numbers. And he was French, the man who made the tattoo.

EP: And tell us, what is the number?

I: 181970.

EP: And when approximately was this, this day, what day, what month, what year?

I: In April, 1944.

EP: What happened then?

I: So after the tattooing, they were taken to the quarantine at Block number 7.

EP: All the Jews?

I: Those who arrived with him.

EP: Yes, but, all of the Jews.

I: Six, there were six and all were together. He was hungry when they went into the quarantine.

[End of CD 1—51 minutes]

I: He used to eat a lot and now he still eats a lot. So then they were going into the building, he noticed a barrel, _____ barrel with the soup. And he could have taken the soup and there was some kind of a bench behind the barrack and there were bowls on it and he wanted to take a bowl and when taking the bowl he just looked and there was a small corpse in the corner, piled very high and in this corner there were a lot of dead bodies. There were all heads and arms and legs and.....the smell... and the bodies were covered with the chloride, you know not to make infections. They were _____, the dead bodies, you know, died because of starvation. They looked like these girls, the _____.

EP: Yes, yes, yes.

I: So people like we have come to Birkenau. We would have lived for maybe eight, nine, months, and that's why they died, adults.

EP: Why would we?

I: Well, that's like an example. Strong people, healthy like he when he was taken, or maybe we, so we would have lived for not a long time. We must realize that Birkenau was situated between two rivers and it was like a...

EP: A swamp.

I: A swamp, but it was also like a death camp. People, the camp, the people with guns, the captain killed people. There were not too many people who made.....could have seemed small. There was a glow over the Birkenau. Others were not able to see what was going on inside. If the trees had been able to talk, they would have said more. The stars show more and nobody more. And Auschwitz was like a camp for _____[business or prison].

EP: And now continuing the chronology. After the number and he saw the suit, and then he saw the dead bodies of the _____ men, what happened then?

I: So after three, maybe four weeks of staying in the quarantine, then the labor officer in the camp came to their building and he picked out three of those six who had arrived with Mr. Mandelbaum and he was one of the three persons. They needed strong people, that's why they were taken. They were taken directly to Sonderkommando. They had no idea what the Sonderkommando was. They came to a building, and the Sonderkommando members said oh, you came, and you are going to burn the bodies. When he found out about the burning, that he was supposed to burn the bodies, he was just shocked like an electric shock, you know. So then on the first day when he came to work he saw the bodies of the people nerved in the gas chambers behind the crematorium. And they had to pull the bodies on the ground to the pits, the burning pits.

EP: Can I ask one question? What nationalities were represented in the Sonderkommando when Mr. Mandelbaum came?

I: Dutch, French, Poles, Jews, Greeks.

EP: What proportion were Jews?

I: All of them.

EP: Is he said that?

I: So Mr. Mandelbaum said there were two non-Jews, Polish non-Jews.

EP: Only two?

I: There were some German kapos, non-Jews.

EP: So two Poles and some German kapos. The rest were Jews.

I: So when he grabbed a body and he tried to pull he couldn't because the skin of the body left in his hand. So he was wondering how can he pull the bodies. So he went to the place where the clothes remained after the Jews, the clothes were not taken. He took a shirt and he just tore and he just make like a rope and he just used it to pull the bodies while the skin left.

EP: One body at a time?

I: Two persons pulled one body.

EP: Okay, so they had to be cloth for two people.

I: Transports arrived day and night. Three shifts, eight hours each. And he says like a Sonderkommando man.

EP: I'm sorry, I have to go back to this. It's a very small but technical point. How were the other Sonderkommando dragging the bodies if the skin was coming off and Mr. Mandelbaum had to tear a shirt to make his own device?

I: The night shift were not able to burn all the bodies so the bodies were removed in the morning and were _____.

EP: Is that why the skin was...

I: It was very hot, the light, it was very hot. So that's why the bodies were not stored in like a morgue or in a....

EP: So this was unusual?

I: The bodies were molding from inside very quickly.

EP: But this was unusual?

I: So we know if you don't have a press...holes...there will be gas coming out.

EP: The gas.

I: From the butt.

EP: So not the Zyklon B. The, the, I want to know was this unusual. For you see, Mr. Mandelbaum says that he had to come up with this device of tearing the shirt...

I: So everyone was looking for his own way to drag the bodies because later he went to Crematorium number 2 and the bodies were transported upstairs with the elevators so people had problem to drag the bodies because it was not slippery, so he took the packet with the water and just sprayed them and that was good because then the bodies just

slide. People not were smart, they were just looking for the way of dragging them along as fast as they can. It's not an art to labor, to hard labor.

EP: But maybe people copied, the smarter ones.

I: So the problem was only with those bodies which were stored for a while in open air, because everything else immediately was up the

EP: And this happened because the night shift couldn't get through it all?

I: There were too many bodies to get through.

EP: So the _____ finished but there were too many bodies, they couldn't do it.

I: And then everything was just on time. But he wants to do something about the transports arriving.

EP: Yeah. Can I just ask these questions?

I: Yes.

EP: The other two Jews that came with Mr. Mandelbaum. Were they, the three of them together in the same barracks?

I: One building...I show you this place...

EP: Sorry, trans...

I: Mr. Mandelbaum lived in the building that I showed you in the section B, 2D, I show you.

EP: I ask these questions for people who weren't with me and you. I want it all recorded, that's why I ask these questions...so everybody that he worked with lived with him and worked the same shift?

I: They did not talk to each other, they are not talking about the pre-war life, about the future, about anything like this. The three people used to do it when they lived together in one building, they just want to talk, they asked questions why are you here, where did you come from, _____ and so on now. They couldn't think because they did so terrible a work that they were just thinking about one thing: how to get out. Of course they knew that the fence was electrified, there were guards, towers, and they were looking for because they were like alive dead, you know what I mean. Because they knew that they would be killed, that they were hopeless, that this situation was hopeless, that they were people just clever because they didn't work that through, such terrible, horrible things like Mr. Mandelbaum.

EP: Sorry, what did you mean, now people?

Now, because he made a comparison that people now are smart, that they have learned something, but no one does, no one has had experiences... That's why they were like not talking about the past, about the future, they were just trying to be.

EP: I want to hear about the transports, but I'm just worried that's going to run out and I want Mr. Mandelbaum to talk about the uprising on the video.

He's going to tell us.

[1:15]

Ok... When he used to work, he found out there were selections of like the previous Sonderkommando, where they were sent to, not home, not to another country, they must have been prepared, they did not suspect, the Nazis had prepared some graves and they were killed so they knew. Those people were different nationalities, they were different and so it was easy to find maybe a spy, you know, a spy. _____, the chief of the crematorium could ask you, could bring you to the office and say, if you know something about anything that would be wrong, you will tell me, of course, if not, I can kill you, but if you tell me, you would live.

EP: Did this happen to Mr. Mandelbaum?

I: No, but it did happen. But he heard about the second selection of the Sonderkommando. I will explain later. So those members who used to work before, the elder workers of the Sonderkommando, not because of age, but because of...

EP: Length of time.

I: Length of time. They decided just, you know, very secretly, to burn one of the crematorium, to scare the Nazis.

EP: What crematorium, what number?

I: Four.

EP: He knew about this in advance?

I: So he found out, so he found out about it when it happened.

EP: Oh, only when it happened?

I: Not everyone in the camp knows, like the old workers knew.

EP: So he was not, like, in the conspiracy?

No....you know, uh, Mr. Mandelbaum wanted to say that there was a group that they planned, they knew each other and they just found one person, a volunteer, some kind of a fanatic who just on the way to work, he just set the crematorium on fire. And before the fire brigade arrived, the building was burning.

EP: So, there was, like in English we have an expression “a loose cannon”, a person who is not following the plan. This person knew, but you said he was like a fanatic, he didn’t do it at the right time?

I: So he sacrificed himself.

EP: This man?

I: This man, right.

EP: So how did he do it?

I: He just needed some kind of, something _____, alcohol.

EP: So this is not the seventh of October, we’re not talking about. Is that what he’s talking about?

I: Yeah.

EP: He is talking about that. So were there explosives?

I: So Mr. Mandelbaum says the crematorium was just set on fire. He didn’t hear any blow-ups.

EP: Didn’t hear anything about explosives.

I: But you know, when it was burning down that the _____ riot....heard the crematorium was burning out, then the SS didn’t really know what to do with them, because they were afraid of them because there were a lot of people, not only the Sonderkommando but 45,000 or more people in the camp. So they make like, just like a short, conference, something like this, and they decided just to put the people down on the ground, like the SS ordered them to lie down, face to the ground, and they shot every third person.

EP: Oh, while it was burning?

I: Yeah. No, it was after. It was after.

EP: We’ve missed a lot, in time. Suddenly, one person sets fire to crematorium number four, number 4, and then there’s a rebellion, it wasn’t just one person....

I: So, Mr. Mandelbaum now, it's he made a sort of a comparison, when you see, when you're taking books off a fire, it's _____, books about the same things, so sometimes you have the details, or sometimes this history, all these histories are different, sometimes, on some levels, so it is not the same. Because he is the person who survived.

EP: Yes.

I: He was there, and you know, that's why this story about the mutinies in the commando, it was probably told about many others who never took part in it.

EP: Told about, or by?

I: You mean?

EP: You said the story about the mutiny, about the Sonderkommando, was told about many others who never took part

I: Told by people who never took the part in it.

EP: Who said that they did?

I: Who were just someone who...

EP: Witnesses.

I: Who were witnesses, yes, sure.

EP: So all I want is to hear Mr. Mandelbaum's story of what he witnessed.

I: That's why he's telling you that he didn't see too much.

EP: Okay, that's okay.

I: He doesn't want to tell more.

EP: Sure, sure.

I: He's telling like he saw it. They were going up to work and one of them set the fire on the crematoria and then it was burning.

EP: Did he see that?

I: So he just like, this man just like...he just run out from the road, from the column like the march just got inside and he just set the fire and he didn't know why, what he used.

EP: This column, was it inside or outside, was it inside the crematorium or was it dragging bodies? Where was it?

I: It was going the same road that we walked, remember, on the same road that was just going toward the crematorium.

EP: Right.

I: So they were not inside, but they were outside of the crematorium.

EP: So this detail, this group of men, they were always working number four?

I: Well, Mr. Mandelbaum, because we must remember that at that time, at the time of the mutiny, crematorium didn't work, four and five didn't work. All the bodies were burned in the pits.

EP: Ah, they had broken down, temporarily.

I: Yeah.

EP: They needed to be fixed.

I: Mr. Mandelbaum would like to, would like to explain you how this cycle of killing people looked like.

EP: Sure.

I: From the moment of arrival to the very end.

EP: Is that instead of, or as well as, explaining what happened in four.

I: He wants to, he wants you to know because, I told you crematoriums four and five didn't work.

EP: Yes.

I: He wants to, he wants you to know how this cycle of killing people looked like.

EP: Do you want to check that that's working?

I: It's working all the time. Don't worry. And because it's a, that's what he wants to tell you. He's not going to tell you everything, because he doesn't know.

EP: Sure.

I: He's just telling you that the things he saw, he knows.

EP: Yeah.

I: That's just why sometimes, he had no idea about the mutiny, I mean he found out about it just on the way to work one day it was burned when it was set on fire.

EP: So this is what I'm trying to establish. I don't want him to say anything he doesn't know or didn't see.

I: Of course, but you know...

EP: But it's not clear. Was he walking in a group when one of them suddenly set it on fire?

I: Yeah, yeah.

EP: And were they outside or inside?

I: Outside...

EP: Were...

I: Outside of the building. They were just going like we're going....remember, along the section that we came and we saw on the right number five and on the left.

EP: Yeah, yeah.

I: So they were on that road. One of them just run out, just got inside, set the crematorium on fire, because like he said, the gas chambers were all worked, but not the crematorium.

EP: So all gassing at this time was being done in the pits.

I: Burning.

EP: Sorry, the burning, was being done in the pits.

I: Yes.

EP: Four and five. But the crematorium, the other numbers, they were working.

I: Yeah.

EP: You can keep talking, but I also have to go. Maybe you want to go after.

I: No, I'll wait.

EP: Excuse me, but it was a good idea.

[They take a break]

EP: Okay, I do want to hear what Mr. Mandelbaum was saying about the process from start to finish, but I also just wanted to get straight anything he remembered about that day, in October... And of course, what he doesn't know.

I: So, this is what he just told you.

EP: Okay. But so he...wasn't aware of anything happening at another crematorium?

I: Mr. Mandelbaum says it is for us, for people who are free now, it's really difficult to comprehend what really has happened.

EP: Yes.

I: And he is _____ and he says in a state in Canada and in Israel, there are also other members of Sonderkommando but they don't want to talk.

EP: Yes.

I: They don't want to talk about that.

EP: Yes.

I: Like it's too hard for them. Because, like he said, they live with the hope to survive.

EP: Sure. So, so, I do want to hear everything about it, I really do, I just want to know if that's it, if he doesn't remember anything more about October the 7th, we won't talk about it. But just from what one knows of the uprising, you know, there was something at four and something at another one as well and I want to know if he remembers...

I: No.

EP: Right. So when number four was burning, what did he do?

I: So, they didn't do anything. They were just near the crematorium and they knew that they would be brought to a punishment because they knew such an event was not a good, not an event that someone would thank, would say thank you, thanks. Or they knew, they expected something wrong. They knew that this is like, they were lost, they were like lost people. So this, what he said about the time when the Sonderkommando was burning, because he just at the moment there was a fire brigade in the SS nearby and then he told me that crematorium number four and five were not used because they were very inefficient for such a scale of extermination, because they didn't use them because there

were so many people killed that they didn't use them anymore. You know, they didn't use them because it was easier to burn the bodies outside than in the crematorium.

EP: Right.

I: Mr. Mandelbaum explained how these burning pits worked because you know, there just was a pit and you know, they put the trees, you know, something flame...

EP: Wood.

I: Then the bodies and the wood, bodies and wood, but when they put many levels, when they just make a lot of levels, there was no the excess of air to the, to the bottom, so that's why it was pretty difficult to burn it, but then there was another problem. What the fastest to burn were the arms, the legs, and the head. The corpse, here, remained, and the buttocks. So they, in the corners of the pits there were small ditches, where the fat was going to, was draining to, was flowing.

EP: These fat were deliberately?

I: Just next to the...now we can't see them but near the pits. Now they just took this fat and used it as the fuel. But it was not possible to burn the buttocks, you know, that's why they had a special metal rods to remove the buttocks from one pit and it would burn in another pit. So it's not so easy to burn the bodies, you know to leave it and it was burning but all the time they needed to do something around, to do something with this. So that's why the bodies was pretty difficult to burn and Mr. Mandelbaum said that if the crematorium two and three hadn't been put into operations so the transports that were coming wouldn't have been killed so fast because these crematorium had a larger capacity than others, four and five were small. And the pits, it was also not so easy to burn in them.

EP: So, um, is Mr. Mandelbaum suggesting that the destruction of crematorium four was only a moral victory?

I: Yes.

EP: It didn't really slow down.

I: Didn't really slow down, maybe just because of the gas chamber that could not be used, but no other way, you know, to slow down the burning bodies, because you know at that time, the crematorium were not used anymore.

EP: So at that time they were used.

I: It's just like he told that he did want to scare that Nazis....that they had some powder, they just wanted to burn it.

EP: So at that time they were using crematoriums one, two, three, and....

I: Two and three.

EP: Just two and three?

I: The gas chambers were...He's telling that crematorium number two was a modern design and that's why, so that's why crematorium two and three were quite modern because every incinerator had a special _____ to increase the fire, increase the pressure, increase the temperature to about 1000, 1100 degrees, which works quite well for cremation. But the others were just, they were _____ because like they could use the human power from the slave labor and that's why they didn't care because all those people were losers, they were lost for Nazis, so they didn't care about, so Mr. Mandelbaum says they didn't care about efficiency so much in crematorium four and five. Mr. Mandelbaum, if you would like to, he can tell you like a cycle of this arrival.

EP: Yes.

I: So the Hitler, when the Nazis decided to expel the people, they wanted Europe to be Judenrein, so they just expelled the people and they told them about the labor and the resettlement movement and they travel several days in the cattle cars with in...

EP: Inhuman conditions.

I: So the people brought all the valuables that they had, the things they could take in a very short time because sometimes they get only two hours to collect they needed, so they get some clothes, toothbrush, the shoes, the coat, and of course, the things that were necessary for them like you know, everything that they earned in their lives, you know, so the jewelry, the money, the earrings, rings, necklaces, you know, everything. When arrived, Mr. Mandelbaum says, when they arrived they were very weak and exhausted. So after they get off the train they are told about the bath, about the showers and then they would be taken to work. So they were told to leave their luggage, their clothes, but everything they could take with them was like the toothbrush, the toothpaste, the towel, the piece of soap, and of course, the most valuable things, not to lose it.

EP: Ask him to say who told them that.

I: They were told about disinfection so they were just took them away so they were just told about this.

EP: Yes, but Germans? Who told them?

I: People took the most valuable things, they didn't want to lose it, you know? This is how the bathhouse would look like, but you know, like with showerheads that were imitation, and of course, and this is how the gas chamber looked like.

EP: With false showerheads.

I: With false showers.

EP: This one is real, down at the bottom in this photograph, I mean, that's...

I: This is the real bathhouse...

EP: Translate.

I: This is the real shower that we saw, but the same—the gas chamber looked the same.

EP: I see, yeah, right. So in the real....wait, this is getting out of control...in the real showers, there were the showerheads attached to water. In the gas chambers there were also real showerheads not attached to anything.

I: Not attached to anything.

EP: Okay. Um...

I: This is the way crematorium four and five looked like.

EP: We've got to get back to language so it's recorded. This, this isn't, I've seen photos. I'm happy to keep going with what happened when they got, when they were told to undress. Let's get back to the chronology of the story.

I: They went to the undressing room, hooks on the walls, benches. They hang the clothes on the hooks, especially those who were earlier because sometimes there were no hooks for everyone.

EP: And what was the response or reaction of the people as they did this? Were they afraid, were they calm

I: Tired. They were tired. They were not panicked.

EP: Not panicked.

I: They just wanted to take a bath. Just wanted to take a bath.

EP: Most of them believed...

I: So the clothes they left in the undressing room and the rest with the toothbrush, you know, soap and towel and the small packets of the jewelry, the most valuable things they took with them.

EP: Into the gas chamber.

I: Into the gas chamber. And behind each transport, behind each group of people that were going to the crematorium, to the gas chamber, the ambulance was driving with the Red Cross, the ambulance with Zyklon B inside. Was driving behind. The ambulance just approached to the crematorium, stopped, pulled over near the crematorium.

EP: Waited.

I: Waited.

EP: Now was anyone hurrying them up?

I: Because he wants to keep going. When they were, when the gas chamber was full to about three-quarters, people realized that something would be wrong so they just wanted to retreat, they wanted to go out, but the SS using the sticks and the clubs, you know, crowbars, just, squeezing another. When all the people got in, then it was full, then they give a sign to the ambulance and they drop Zyklon B.

EP: Why, before the doors closed, why were the people starting to get agitated, when it was three-quarters full.

I: Because they knew that...

EP: I want him to say it. Ask him. Even, the point of this is to get his words answering, even if they sound like obvious or stupid questions.

I: He said to me. When they get in, they realize there are too many of them to take a shower.

EP: Because why?

I: Because...

EP: Because there wasn't enough...

I: Because there was not enough, because it was too crowded.

EP: Okay.

I: Too many.

EP: So before this, when they were getting undressed, nobody, or very few people were suspicious? Can he say?

I: They were not suspicious. Why, he asked. Because people were _____ tired, they were told about this disinfection bath.

EP: What did he say?

I: He said everyone was suspicious because there were so many people around. He says that it is a problem to estimate the numbers of the victims now and he just connected the number of the victims with the people who were suspicious.

EP: But is everyone suspicious or no one suspicious, I mean I have to ask these questions. Maybe you could stop and explain that I'm asking questions for this as though the listener knows nothing.

I: I see.

EP: And that after the three of us are not here anymore, people can listen to this and they need to understand step by step how it happened. So if I sound like an idiot or I ask stupid questions, I don't mean to annoy him, but this might be all we have after us.

I: And it would be very difficult for this next generation to understand because they have never seen it. Just from the story, from them.

EP: I understand [in Yiddish] but we have to try, so that's why I ask step by step.

I: Because Mr. Mandelbaum says that the people got into the gas chamber and then the Zyklon B was dropped inside they, and he was _____ it became a gas and they died in ten, twenty, thirty minutes. Then the gas chamber was opened and he said that he doesn't, he doesn't want even an enemy to see this view. Those people who were murdered in the gas chamber. He doesn't want even an enemy to see that.

EP: Well, what was that view?

I: They were bleeding, vomiting, excrements, you know, um.

EP: But, I don't know whether he said it in Polish or not but we want to hear how they were standing, were they sitting, were they _____.

I: Standing.

EP: All were standing?

I: So they needed a place to fall, so that's why they were standing. They were just, like, you know, _____ a little bit to one or a different side, but they were...

EP: And um..

I: He said you must, you have to be very very strong nerves, you know, mentally, to be able to get through such things.

EP: In the Sonderkommando.

I: In the Sonderkommando, yeah, of course. Now we have the freedom, don't even can _____ that and we you know _____. So Mr. Mandelbaum had recently an interview with Italian television and he just make some kind of appeal to all the heads of the states that they should assemble somewhere and think about the humanity, about the way they are doing too, because, you know, we commit so many bad things, and people are hurt, there are so many orphans, disabled people, you know, and the human life is so short, we shouldn't... We don't need wars but agreement.

EP: I want to go back to what he was doing when this happened, this twenty to thirty minutes, what was he doing?

I: So he used to work outside. He says they used to work when the people were dying, you know, but in 1944, there were so many murdered people that they used other pits that were behind the woods and these are the photographs. We can see Mr. Mandelbaum standing there at those pits. I mentioned about this red and white house that was nearby and they used these clothes.

EP: So this is behind the trees.

I: It's a farm and we haven't been there.

EP: Okay, okay.

I: And we can find these crosses and starts now because [it's just the metal?]

EP: We can or cannot?

I: Cannot.

EP: Okay. But it's still within the camp? And it's within the current borders of the camp. So somewhere it can be found.

I: Yeah.

EP: Does the Museum know where these pits are?

I: Of course.

EP: So we just didn't go there.

I: We didn't go, we were just nearby.

EP: Um, I want to ask whether everyone in the Sonderkommando did the same thing.

I: This is the way they were pressed. So they changed each other. Some of the units of the groups were doing different work.

EP: And who decided when to change.

I: They on their own, decided to change. The dead body is very heavy so people couldn't grab the bodies, you know, and carry the bodies all eight hours, so that's why they changed.

EP: Take it in turns.

I: Take it in turns.

EP: And it was an informal agreement between members of the Sonderkommando.

I: Yes, there was an informal agreement. This is the statement because Mr. Mandelbaum saved four persons, people, and it is written down "_____ born in 1921 on April 18 was a prisoner of the concentration camp in Oswiecim in the years 1941 to July 17, 1944 to the day of my escape. The escape was a collective in which four other people took part on _____ number 88 died, in _____ number 180 died, _____ 12,049 died, _____ 10,291. My friend from the childhood, Henryk Mandelbaum in Camp Oswiecim, was employed in Sonderkommando with whom I succeeded to make a contact and he, he just supplied us, me and my colleagues, _____ with 10,000DM and a few watches and rings. Without his help, the escape wouldn't have succeeded and for help and for help to us and revealing this fact, we were in danger of death. Signed by the statement of the man.

EP: Who was in danger of death?

I: All those people, those escapees and Mr. Mandelbaum.

EP: Sure.

I: For revealing the fact that they were...

EP: So these people were not in the Sonderkommando?

I: No, they had a contact with Mr. Mandelbaum and he gave them 10,000 marks and watches and....

EP: Which he got off the property that came in?

I:...organizing....

EP: Did he do it on his own, or were other Sonderkommando helping him?

I: On his own.

EP: I'm interested in how Mr. Mandelbaum spoke to these people if they weren't, how was contact?

I: Mr. Kodeg was oberkapo of the kitchen and they just, he just met him once accidentally in the camp and then they made a contact.

EP: But how would they communicate with each other?

I: As the oberkapo...