

That will happen later. And later, we had to undress and again all our clothes had to be put in one pile, and shoes, and everything we had to take off. And we had showers. And this time, we did not know for a long time that the other side, on the right side, what those showers meant. We had no idea.

And after the showers, we were shaved. We had no hair on us. And we were disinfected, sprayed, and humiliated so very badly. We didn't recognize each other without hair almost. And then we went to another pile of clothes, and we could choose from there, or were given. I can't exactly recall something to put on. We had no underwear. We had shoes not fitting. We had a blouse, or a skirt, or a dress that was much smaller or much bigger. And it was very uncomfortable. That was the first night.

That's your first night at Auschwitz. And there's so much for us to cover. And we're not going to be able to do it all. But I'd like you, Agi, if you wouldn't mind talk about an incident soon after you arrived in which involves your, I believe your best friend, Edith.

Oh yes, yes. The next day loudspeakers came with trucks. And they told that all the girls under 16 should stand out of the lines. We were all the time in lines. We were counted all the time. And they will have a better faith, and a better food, and better conditions. And many, many girls run to the trucks. And my mother kept this friend of mine, Edith. Told her, no, you stay with us. I look after you and you just stay with us.

She says, no, no. Maybe I will meet my mother. Maybe I can see my mother and I. I want to go. And we never seen her anymore. And we also wanted to go my sister and me, actually. But my mother told us we just stay where she is, and we shouldn't go.

Your mother, for her keeping the three of you together, was all that it was about, was keeping the three of you together. And so even in a circumstance like that, she wasn't going to let you separate from her at that point.

She says there can be such good conditions, whatever we were dreaming of or thinking of, we have to stay with her. It's the only way she can-- she didn't tell us those days that it's the only way she can keep us alive. But that was her goal. That was her idea, her dream, just to keep us with her.

Agi, from there, you were sent out of Auschwitz to this place called Plasza³w. Tell us about Plasza³w

We were sent out again with those cattle cars. And we went to another camp that was much worse than Auschwitz. The only good thing was about it that when we got off the trains, there were no selections. So there were no separations at least. That was the only good thing about it. It was worse in every single way.

There was the commander of this camp was, I suppose he must have been sick. He had such ideas that I can't even talk about it. They had trained dogs, and he was on horseback all the time watching people, whether they are doing what they are supposed to do. We were working in a quarry, in two actually, to take big stones from one to the other. The next day, we had to carry them back. And the stones had to be very big. And it was very, very hard work. And it was very hot, and when it was raining it was wet. I mean there was no difference what the weather was.

And at a point, my sister, my mother told her to take a smaller stone, because she didn't think that she can carry the stones that were laid out there. And she picked up a smaller one. And then she was beaten badly, because of it. They thought she's supposed to take the big stones. And we had quite a hard couple of weeks there.

And yet somehow you got sent back to Auschwitz. Why was that?

I suppose they heard the Russians nearing. We heard cannons and they didn't want us to be liberated. It seems they didn't want them to know that there is this camp, and they emptied the camp completely. And again, we were sent back to the cattle cars. And again a very, very, very difficult trip back to Auschwitz. We were very weakened at this time already. We were very thin, very, very bad condition actually. And--

In fact, one of the things I think you said to me, Agi, was that you had very, very severe sunburns.

Yes.

From doing the labor in the quarry yards.

Yes. We had sunburns and we were very weak-- weakened. And when they opened the doors we just couldn't believe that we were sent back to Auschwitz. We recognized it immediately. And then my mother really got scared. She told, now I don't know. She says, she will go first again. And then my sister, and then me. And see to it that you come to the same side, and say that you want to work. That the last word she could tell us.

And she went. And my sister went, both of them to the left side. Many people were sent, of course, to the right side. And so was I. And then I got some courage, and told the officer standing in front of me that I did not know those days that he was Dr. Mengele. And I told him that I want to go to that side. So he said, he was shocked. He says, what's on that side. I told him that side, as I was taught, I didn't say that my mother and sister. I told them there are working people there. And I wanted to work.

He says, you don't look to me that you can still work. I told him, I can prove it. And then he realized that we were talking German. So he asked, how do you speak German? Because it was a Hungarian transport. And then he told, OK. Go over there. Go to that side.

For those in the audience who might not know, just say a word about who this person was.

Mengele was one of the worst German officers, the cruelest, he was making experiments all the time on people. I cannot even tell you what experiments. He took many twins, and experimented with twins, which twin can survive, all sorts of sick ideas of his. So really I can't talk about it.

And you confronted him in a sense, and--

I didn't know.

Yes.

I didn't know who he was. And even if I had known, I didn't know what he was actually. And all I knew that I was told to go to the group where they are working.

But mother fainted when she saw the discussion. And when I got to her, still then something happened again. We saw long tables and there were Germans. And kapos doing tattooing. And they were tattooing our arms with a number. And then I felt it. It was hurting, but not that much. That wasn't the reason. But the humiliation of it, and the fact, and so it was very traumatic, it was.

And Agi, if you don't mind my asking or mentioning this, the number that was tattooed on you, was it the same time that your mother and your sister were tattooed. So you had three consecutive numbers between--

Yes, exactly.

--your mother and your sister.

And we stopped being persons, names. We just were numbers.

One other incident I was going to mention, ask you about, at one point, as you said you were in line very many, many times. At one point your mother had you take off your eyeglasses, because you wore eyeglasses.

When the selection were going on, then they were looking for workers. And they looked either at feet, or at hands, that

the people are strong enough, and mostly at eyes. And my mother was always afraid that when they see me with the eyeglasses, I will not be able to be in her group. So she always took off my glasses, and put it sideways in her shoes.

I don't know how we did it. I don't know how she did it. But I came back with those same glasses. I suppose I still have them.

Is that right?

Yeah, they never broke. They never got lost. They-- we were so terribly careful about it. My life depended on them. So we were so lucky in a way. We were lucky with the scarves, lucky with the glasses, lucky with this conversation with Mengele. It needed a lot of luck also.

Agi, at this point your mother, and she had actually suffered an injury in the cattle car, and that led to another unusual and certainly important incident, if you don't mind mentioning that.

OK. Well, somebody wanted to look out of this cattle car to see where we are, or which direction we are going. So they accidentally stepped on her shoulder, and she had some red rash like a skin infection. And we were examined all the time for all sorts of illnesses. And they saw it on my mother. They thought it might be a contagious infection.

So they took her to the quarantine. And that was a tragedy. She was separated from us. And we were desperate in a way. And she knew that we won't make it if we are not together. So she came up with an idea that a girl whose sister was also in the quarantine from our barracks to make the exchange, when we are not being counted, when we are not standing in line.

So her, there was a girl in the infirmary where your mother, was or quarantine where your mother was. And her sister was where you and your sister were?

No, somebody's sister.

Somebody's sister.

Somebody's sister. Because she wanted that much to be with her sister, the way we wanted to be with my mother. So she convinced her to make the exchange. She says, you come to my barrack, and I go to the other one. And you'll be together again. And then we'll be together again. She made it. But the girl didn't make it. She got cold feet. And she stayed where she was. That means that we were one more. And in the quarantine there was one less.

So the Germans were attacking us very much about it. They thought that either the whole barrack will be infected now with the one who came from the quarantine. They didn't know who. And she was supposed to stand out of line and tell that she was the one, or anybody who knows her, or anybody knows who did it, they should stand up and tell it. And of course, I don't know whether it's of course. Nobody did it. Nobody told on us.

And they told they are going to shoot us, if they will not find out who it is and that only one person will be punished. And it took a day and half a night, we were standing outside. And they were deliberating what to do with us, and telling all the time, come on. You have to tell it. You have to tell it. And nobody told it.

So we were lucky again.

Yeah, so you weren't-- they didn't carry out their threat to shoot you.

They did not. They did not. And the people in our barrack didn't tell on us. We were rather popular. People who were stealing from each other, bread and food, and blankets, and whatever they needed. And we did not. My mother and my sister and me, we did not steal from nobody, and somehow they liked us. And they didn't tell on us.

They didn't tell on you.

And some time after that then, Agi, you were sent out away from Auschwitz again, this time to perform slave labor. Tell us where you were sent and what happened.

So there were again selections. And this time it was very strict, that they looked for good eyes and good hands. That meant us, that we were not going to work physical labor, at least. So we got again into one group. I don't remember exactly how, but we were again together. But it was winter and it was a very, very hard trip in the wagons. And my feet were frozen. My mother was rubbing it all the while until we arrived.

And we arrived to a small town named Rochlitz where we were taken to much better barracks than before, better conditions, better clothing, better food. The barracks were heated. So it was a big difference. But the biggest difference was when I got a pencil in my hand. I was so happy with this pencil. I felt that I'm human again, that I had a pencil.

A pencil?

A pencil. I was happier with the pencil, and with another piece of bread. And we were taught how to work the revolver [NON-ENGLISH]. That was a big machine making airplanes spare parts out of aluminum. And all the three of us had different assignments actually. And this took a couple of weeks. And then we were taken to the real factory, where we--

So that was really a training place.

It was just a training place.

To teach you how to do the different jobs.

Yes.

OK.

And then we were taken to Calw. That is near Stuttgart. And that was a very big factory. But they did not want to know the people in the town that there were prisoners, prisoners of war, or slaves, or however they called us those days. And we were working at night only. And nobody was supposed to see us, and even the food was brought in at night. And the work was very hard from 7:00 in the evening till 7:00 in the morning. And at night, at 1:00, 2:00, 3 o'clock, it was one couldn't keep awake anymore. That was a very monotonous work.

And one of the young women fell asleep near the machine, and her hand was caught in it, and it was very tragic. But it woke us up. I mean that we should be whatever it takes, careful.

If I remember right, there were about 200 of you women, all women doing this. Is that right?

200 women, 180 Hungarians and 20 kapos actually, Polish women from them.

20 kapos?

I think the half of them were kapos and half of them were Polish people. They were not good to us, telling us, reminding us all the time that they were already five years in Auschwitz, when we were still free, and happy, and going to cinemas, and the coffee houses, and being in our homes. And that made them justify not to be nice to us.

Tell us what kind of work you were doing. It was a [NON-ENGLISH], it was small screws. And we had to fit into another spare part. And my sister was working at the controls, to control whether it's too big, or it's too small, or whether it's just right. And when it was a little bigger, than it was given to the group where my mother was working. And there was a filing wheel that she had to press the spare part to it.

To get it to the right size.

To get it to the right size. She had to be very careful, always a little bit, and then to measure it again, and again a little bit, and measure it again. And then she somehow pressed it more onto it, and then the stone broke. And it took a few days until we could get another stone coming. And then the whole work had to stop because it couldn't be sent out, transferred to the aeroplane factories.

And then my mother caught on that it might be a good idea to do this several times. And then she fainted before or after, and it looked as if she did it because it was she wasn't feeling well. So it was it sabotage actually, but we didn't know, not my sister and not me, and she did it very diligently. She wasn't found out. But she she did it several times.

But she knew how to make that grinding stone break?

After the first time, incidentally she knew it already.

What a remarkable woman.

Oh yes, she was. She was.

So there you are performing the slave labor in this factory, working at night. What happened to you then after you were doing that? We were again moved. We were moved. This time not in cattle cars, not in any other trains or carts. We were just walking. We had to walk 400 kilometers at night, because again, they didn't want us to be seen. And we were guarded by two officers, a woman and a man, and four soldiers. That's all.

And still, the group of women only.

And still the group of women only. We were one less. Someone got typhus, and she died still in Calw. But nobody else got sick. And it was a very, very hard march. It was--

This was winter time, wasn't it?

Winter.

Winter 1945.

It was after February, at the end of February. And we had to cross rivers, and we have to cross forests. And there were stones. And we had no more shoes. And I had rags bound around my feet, and it didn't last very long. And it was very hard. And at a point, I refused to go on. I just wanted to sit. And I just-- I can't. I couldn't anymore. And we were told that we are supposed to come to a railway station in order to continue by train.

Because the train will come at a certain time. But we later found out that the train had to bring ammunition, and an order, written order, to execute us, and to bring papers, Swiss papers for the officers to go over to Switzerland. That was what we found out later. So we didn't make it. We couldn't get to the train. And my mother was begging me and crying, come on, come on. We can't walk anymore anyhow.

And we were late. But we saw the envelope that the German officers got.

But you missed the train?

But that's all. We missed the train. So they got only their papers, I suppose. And we went back to the forest. And everybody was mad at me that actually because I couldn't move anymore quicker. And then after a while, we looked around. And someone told, there are no more-- no more Germans around us. And really, there was no one. No one guarding us.

The guards had just disappeared?

They just disappeared, and we were on our own. And then the Lageralteste, the way she was called, the kapo. she told us that she has to tell us something. But she had no heart to tell us what she was supposed to tell. So she told us so slowly that from today, the 28th of April 1945, you are-- she couldn't bring herself to tell the word free. So that was actually the end of the camps. And then they also disappeared, the kapos, because they were afraid that we might do something.

We had no strength to do anything, I mean.

So here you are, about 180 women, very weak, been through this terrible march. And you're out there. And now you're alone.

Yeah. We didn't know what to do.

How did you decided what to do?

People started to argue where we are. It was night. We had no idea where we were. So somebody goes south, somebody to go left. So we just stayed 20 with the same opinion. And we--

20 with the same opinion, who went in the same direction.

Yeah, that's all. Same direction. And so we went to the same direction. And then we saw American soldiers coming opposite us. And as happy as we were to see them, so frightened we became. What will they think? Who are we? What are we? The way we looked, it was horrible the way we looked. And we found some white underwear to show them. We found a stick, and we--

That was your surrender flag?

Yes. And only I knew English. And I went to try to explain them, what we are, who we are. They just couldn't believe it. They've never seen such. They haven't been yet to Mauthausen and to all the other camps, where they saw even worse-- people in worse condition. So they took us to their headquarters, and let us use their facilities, and to change, and to bath, and to eat. And so we started to feel the freedom again.

Liberated by the American soldiers.

Yes.

Agi, before we turn to our audience and ask them a few questions, and have them ask a few questions of you, just say a few words. Because obviously so much happened once the war was over for you, and you're in the hands of the United States Army. And at that point, soon after the war, your mother had some decisions to make. And tell us what she chose to do.

We stayed almost eight months in Germany in Innsbruck where the United Nations-- United Restitution offices were. They looked after us, and they tried to make us decide. And they wanted to help us whatever-- we wanted Palestine, America, whatever we wanted. And my mother wanted to go back to Hungary to find out who remained alive.

And so we went back.

Went back to Hungary.

We went back to Hungary. And she found most of her family. We were, again, very lucky. One of my uncles and a very, very good friend of ours couldn't make it. They died from hunger, as we heard later. It was unbelievable. They were not shot. They were not-- just died from hunger. And then he went back to Miskolc, and she found the pantheon empty. There was nothing in it, nothing. She wanted to start business again. How could she live and continue?

So she went for help to the municipality. And someone came with her, and they asked her whether where your stuff is. She told, yes. And she went from neighbor to neighbor, and found all our furniture, and everything that was taken from the house. She got it all back. She furnished it again, and she started business again.

But before the war, we gave to our Christian friends, the jewelry and her fur coats, and what she had. And we thought if we get this back then we can start business again, anyhow. And everybody, nothing we got back. They told the Russians took it they told me. That we never thought that you will come back. Some people told, why did you come back? It was very, very traumatic the way they behaved, and the way people didn't accept our return.

Actually, I didn't want to return. And I wanted immediately to leave. But--

But your mom wanted to go back into business.

She went back to business, yes.

Well, Agi, if you don't mind, why don't we turn to our audience and see if they have a few questions for you before we wrap up today's program? And here again, before we close today, from Agi, for a few more thoughts from her. Anybody want to ask Agi a question? Right here, in the front row.

What happened to your mother and sister eventually?

The question is, what happened to your mother and your sister eventually?

So my sister is in Israel, and my mother died three years ago. She was 97 and 1/2. And she had a beautiful life in Israel in a kibbutz. She couldn't come with us when we left Israel, because they didn't let people leave anymore, the communism was already in Hungary.

When you left for Israel from Hungary.

When I left Israel, yeah. But we thought it will take a year or even less. But it took eight years until she could come. But she married in between, very happily, and she came with her husband to Israel, and she lived a very, very nice life till the age of 97 and 1/2.

OK. Yes ma'am?

What is a kapo?

The question is what is a kapo. The question is what is a kapo.

It was someone who was responsible for a group, like a policeman, like a gendarme, but without arms, without guns. They were responsible for actually for the barracks. Every barrack had a kapo.

Were they not German?

No.

They're almost like--

They could be Hungarian.

--also for the same.

They were Polish usually.

Almost like a trustee in a prison, think of a trustee in a prison, kind of similar to that as a concept, as a rough way of looking at it, perhaps.

We depended on them very much. And the Germans made them responsible for the people they were guarding actually.

OK ma'am, back there?

Why did you leave Israel to come to the United State?

The question is, why did you leave Israel and come to the United States?

My daughter is living here. And she invited me to come and stay with her and her husband, and--