

--paid to get out or get into the ghetto. Obviously, if one was caught outside the ghetto without a permit, a written permit, the guards and the militia had orders to kill.

I would like-- may I share one of my experiences? One-- we took turns, the 20 of us took turns when we should get out to try to help our families with food. Food was a very, very critical thing for us. It was never enough food. The people who worked did receive a very meager portion every day that they worked. But it was not enough to live on. And it was not enough to die.

And since you weren't working, you weren't entitled to it?

That's right. People who didn't-- children who didn't work and the very old people didn't get any food ration at all. Well, anyway, this tunnel of ours, the hole was a great help. And I remember, one time, it was my turn to go out and to try find some food for my family. Of course, I did not share that time that I had to go with my parents-- with my family.

But I did have a small gold and ruby ring, my mother's. And I took that with me. I remember, it was summertime. I was wearing a dress with puffed sleeves. I took off my Star of David in the front and back of my dress. And I worked my way out of the kiosk. I was lucky. I found a farmer or a peasant who gave me two eggs for the gold and ruby ring. I put an egg in each puff and walked back, trying to reach the kiosk in order to get back to the ghetto.

Before I reached the kiosk, I was apprehended by a militiaman. He started yelling and he searched me. He did find the two eggs. He dropped them on the sidewalk. And he kept rubbing my face and the eggs on the sidewalk until I was bleeding profusely. But I wasn't hurt very badly. And he kept screaming. I don't know if he recognized me. Because in our town, everybody knew everyone else. But he kept yelling, go back where you belong and never to come out of that ghetto. Stay where you supposed to stay. And he let me go. He was one of the kind-hearted guards. My bloody face healed. And I had my life.

A few days later, one of my friends-- it was her turn to go and try to obtain some food via the tunnel. I don't know if she had money or jewelry, but she was lucky. Well, she was not lucky. But she obtained a half a loaf of bread. But on the way to the kiosk, she was also stopped. And the guard searched her. He found the bread. And he murdered her. She was not quite 11 years old.

And so life went on in the ghetto. It was very, very difficult to live from day to day. But somehow, my mother was a magician. And she would come home from work with just a little bit of greens, or beans, or whatever. And she would fill it with water and all. And many times, she would bring some urchins, some kids who didn't have parents anymore. And we shared our meager meal. Nothing tasted as good-- now, even, pheasant on the glass would not taste as good as that soup that my mother concocted with practically nothing.

It was just something that no one should ever have to live through. And this is why it's so important for us survivors to bear witness, especially as I look and see so many beautiful young faces here. It is very, very important for you to know what went on and how it was happening. And I do have something that I speak at schools. Mostly, I'll say that later. But it's something to remember and something to try for our young people to apply in their everyday life. It is most important.

And I think most of us survivors feel that we do have an obligation. And I know that in the beginning, when I first came to this wonderful country, I was angry, and I was confused, and I hated everyone and everything. And then I married a wonderful, wonderful man, an American military man. And he explained to me the priorities and what my obligation is. And my obligation is to inform all of you what transpired during the Holocaust so that it would never ever, ever happen again.

Charlene, you would be moved to a second ghetto. And we should probably talk about that soon and about your escape from that ghetto. But before you do, tell us about the incident in which your sister became ill in the knitting factory and was not able to work.

Do we have time?

That one's important, I think. And then we'll move on from there.

OK. I'll try to make it shorter again. One day, my sister became very ill. She came home from work very ill. She had a headache and a high fever. And by that time, there was not one doctor left in the ghetto. There was no hospital. There were no pharmacies. There was nothing to help anyone who became ill. Everyone had to rely on their own, I guess, ways of trying to combat illness.

My mother heard that putting slices of raw potato on one's forehead would try-- would remove the high fever of a person. And my mother stayed up all night long after she came home from work applying slices of raw potato to my sister's forehead. I was, I guess, selfish. I went to sleep. But my mother stayed up all night. And then in the morning, she was ready to go to work.

Well, I got up in the morning. My sister was still quite ill. She was somewhat better, but not enough to go to work. If she didn't go to work that day, that meant she would not receive the food ration for that day. And food was of utmost importance to us. I was five years younger than my sister. I knew how to knit and crochet. Obviously, I was not as efficient as the older girls. But I came up with a plan. And I tried to persuade my mom to allow me to take my sister's place for that one day.

Mama wouldn't listen to me. But then I tried to reason with her. I remember that my sister would come home from work and would always say how lucky she felt because her job was actually easy. They were in a covered building. They didn't have to face the raw elements. And the guards who guarded them were mostly concerned with their presence, they didn't beat them, they didn't scream, and that she was very lucky to be in that group. And so I tried to repeat this to my mom and tried to reason with her, that it was pretty safe for me to take my sister's place for that one day.

Apparently, I did manage to convince her. And Mama said, OK, I can go for that one day to take my sister's place. We left my sister in the room still very sick. Mama went and joined her group. And she showed me where the older girls were congregating.

The older girls took me in. We marched to the warehouse outside the ghetto to the knitting factory. And when we got in, they showed me where my sister was sitting. I took my place, picked up the two needles, and started knitting. I don't remember if it was a scarf or a hat, but something very simple. And I felt very, very happy that this operation will be successful.

My most terrible timing was on that day. That day, it was the exquisite bad timing. That day, the Germans decided to have an inspection of the knitting factory. All of a sudden, a covered truck parked in front of the warehouse. A group of Germans burst in to the warehouse, positioned themselves all over the place.

One German stood right behind me. I must have been smaller, obviously, than the rest of the girls. I don't know why I attracted his attention-- probably because of that. And he watched me for a while. And then he started screaming, schneller, schneller, schneller, meaning faster, faster in German, for me to knit faster. And the more he yelled, the slower I was knitting. I wished I could have disappeared, but I didn't. He became so enraged, his face became red as a beet. And there was foam coming out of his mouth. He jumped in front of me, right in front of my face, and watched me for a while, cursing and still screaming, schneller, schneller. It was one of the most horrific things in my life.

After a while, he grabbed the needles, the knitting needles, out of my hands and stuck one needle into my right forefinger. I passed out. And that was the end for the day for me. Sadly, I never did get the food ration for that day. The older girls took care of me. And later, when-- after work and when the Germans left, they told me I was very lucky that this German did not kill me. And I did consider myself lucky.

But I came home, and my mother hugged me, and she cried. And she says, I'll never let you go out on your own. It was the wrong decision. This is just one example of the sadism and of the meanness of the Germans. It was something so unexpected, and so mean, and so ugly. And I could stand here-- sit here for days and tell you about instances that similar

things were happening in the ghetto. Every day, they would grab people who were Orthodox with beards and they would try to cut them and cut them in installments, like they would cut the religious--

Ear locks.

--ear locks. Thank you. And they would do all these things just to make our life as miserable as they can.

Charlene so there's so much more for you to tell us in a short time. Tell us about when you were moved-- you, and your mother, and sister were moved into the next ghetto. Tell us quickly, if you can, how the ghetto was structured and then about your mother's decision to escape from there.

Well, at that time, we were missing our father something terrible. And my mother was trying to inject hope in everything she did. I think I survived only because of my mother. She would come home and she would tell us stories how we would greet our dad when he came home. And she would make these magical soups and all.

But after a while, there were horrible things going on in the ghetto. There were what they called lapanka. These were-- these occurred once a week, or at least once a week, where the Germans would drive by with a covered truck. And they would grab you before work, after work, in the middle of the night, whenever they felt like it. And these people were never, ever heard from again.

Pretty soon, the number of survivor-- number of ghetto-- people living in the ghetto diminished considerably. And at that time, the Germans decided to move us to a smaller ghetto. Now, the next ghetto, they looked around and they selected a place that was not inhabited for many years. The houses were in great disrepair. And they decided this would be the place for the second-- the smaller ghetto. They built wooden fences around it, again, like the first ghetto was built with a-- what do you call it-- the barbed wire that reinforced the wooden.

And there was--

Yeah, the wooden fences. And there were, again, two gates that were guarded 24/7. But this new ghetto was only enclosed on three sides because the fourth side, there was a river that separated our town from a neighboring village. Mother, my sister, and I, and several other families were assigned a space in a house right on the river. And the river was actually a barrier, a natural barrier. So there was no fence or barbed wire.

At that time, the rumors-- we only had rumors. We didn't have newspapers. We didn't have radio. We didn't have telephones. And so all we lived-- or the adults lived-- is on rumors that they gathered from the outside. The rumors started that the ghetto would be liquidated that summer. That was 1942.

Now, when I use the word determine-- the terminology liquidation, this is the way the Germans referred to the fact that they would get rid of, kill, liquidate all the Jews in the ghetto. And this is the way the format was actually going around in all eastern Poland-- and in western Poland too. At that time, my mother, who worked outside the ghetto-- I mean, most of the work was outside. And sometimes, they would come home black and blue from beatings they endured at work.

But my mother tried to concentrate in finding a farmer who would be willing to hide my sister, my mother, and me. When the time was close to the liquidation of the ghetto, she could not find one farmer who would be willing to hide the three of us. She found two farmers. One was willing to hide one person. And the other one was willing to hide two people.

Now, my mother had to make the difficult decision how to divide our family. And she finally came to the conclusion that my sister, who was five years older than I, could manage to go to the farmer who was willing to hide one person. And then once she was safe, then mother and I would go to the other farmer. Well, my mother started giving me directions how to get to the farmer who was willing to hide two people.

But I did not need directions. This farmer, we used to buy from him dairy products before the war. And one of his

daughters actually attended elementary school in classes with me. So we knew where they lived. And that was no problem for me. But Mama still kept giving me directions how to get there, how not to get lost.

Early in the summer, when the signs became ominous that the liquidation of the ghetto would take place soon, my sister and my mother got up in the morning, we ate our meager breakfast, and I said goodbye to my terrific big sister. She was to go to work. And right, directly from work, she was going to be picked up by the farmer who was willing to hide one person.

Mother came home from work that evening. We didn't hear anything. That meant that everything went well because if there were complications, we would have heard. Mama waited another day or two. And we didn't hear anything. And she was happy. And so was I because that meant that my sister reached her destination without any complications. And everything was going according to plan.

And by that time, Mama told me, and she came home, we ate a meager meal. She told me to put on my best clothes and to take an extra set of clothing and shoes with me. She packed a small bundle for herself, one for me. And we left the ghetto. I remember holding tightly into my mother's hand as we entered into the stillness of the dark night.

Pretty soon, we were in the river. Shots rang out. We hid in the bulrushes and couldn't move because it was so quiet in between that any sound would have given us away. I remember giving my mother a hard time. We were in the bulrushes. And the water was reaching my chin. I was short, like I am now. My mother was tall. And she could crouch and rest.

And we stayed there all night. We could not move because the shots were sporadic. But in between, it was quiet. And we could not go. We could not swim and cross the river. In the morning, other people did a similar thing. The only way to leave the ghetto without a permit was to go and cross the river.

By now, the shots were more regular now. And I mean, they were coming from every side. And people in the river were trying to cross the river. And the guards and the militia kept yelling, come out, Jew, we can see you and in Ukrainian, [UKRAINIAN]. And people would come up with their arms up. And before they even blinked, they were murdered. To say that the river turned red from all these murders of people in the river would be an understatement.

Mother and I stayed in the bulrushes. And I was giving mama a very hard time. It was very difficult for me to stay in the river with the water reaching to my chin. Mother had to support me in the back so when I dozed, I would not fall over. I don't remember if we stayed in the river four or five days. The shots were coming from every direction. And we heard kids screaming. We saw fire and smoke coming from the ghetto. They were liquidating the ghetto.

I remember, Mother gave me some soggy bread. And it tasted awful. But she insisted, I had to eat it to keep strong. It was very difficult. And to this day, I cannot forgive myself for being so difficult to my mom. One time, I dozed off. And Mama would support me with her hands in the back so I wouldn't fall and drown. I don't know if it was four or five days. But when I opened my eyes that dark, horrible day, I looked around and my mother was nowhere in sight. I felt like screaming and crying, Mama, come, help me. But Mama was nowhere in sight.

I kept quiet for the rest of that day. I can't begin to even comprehend now how I could stay quiet that day. I kept looking and hoping mama would come from behind the bulrush or something. But she didn't. That night, all became quiet. The Germans did their job. They did liquidate the ghetto.

I felt maybe mother tried to wake me and she couldn't. And so she went to the farmer. And she hoped that when I wake up-- when I woke up, I would cross the river and I would join her at the farmer's place. And so that was the only thing for me to do. I could not allow myself to think that I would never, ever see my mother again. And so I crossed the river. And I walked all night long.

It was dawn when I reached the farmer's place. The farmer was outside. And he motioned to me not to enter his house, wouldn't even invite me into the house. He motioned for me to go into the barn. And he followed me. I asked him, is my mother here? He said, no, he has not seen her. And then he says, and furthermore, I will allow you to stay here for the

day. And then you better leave, or else I'll report you and take you with me to the authorities, which would mean that they would murder me right there and then. And he would get some kind of a reward or monetary reward.

I pleaded with him to allow me to stay one more day, just in hopes that my mother would come and join me. He wouldn't listen to me. He walked out. And I stood there, completely disoriented, didn't know what to do. Late that afternoon, the farmer's wife came in with a slice of bread and an apple. And she said to me, my child, if you want to live, leave. My husband means business. I said, how could he? I mean, he promised my mother that he would keep us. Well, he changed his mind. What I didn't tell you is when I saw him, he was wearing dirty coveralls. And there, in his one pocket, was my father's gold pocket watch and chain.

I listened to the farmer's wife. And I left. I wanted to live. At that time, I tried to reason with myself that perhaps my mother went to the farmer, he refused to keep her, and she went in to hide in the forests. That area of Poland abounds with dense forests. And that's what I tried to do.

At that point, I was running from forest to forest in search of my mother. I could not allow myself to think even that I would never find my mother. But I never did. Had I allowed that kind of thought into my mind, I would not have survived one second. The only thing that gave me hope and gave me strength to go on was the fact that I would find my mother. But I never did.

Charlene, we're very close--