Ilona Stein, July 8, 1987

This is Muriel Nathanson and we’re going to interview Mrs. Ilona Stein. We’re at Mrs. Stein’s home and this is June 2, 1987. First of all, Mrs. Stein, I want to thank you so much for being a part of this project, and please, anytime during the course of the interview that you want to stop just let me know and I’ll turn the tapes off.

Q: Mrs. Stein, tell me about your family, your parents, where you grew up.

A: Alright. It was in Ukrainian, a small town. I really don’t remember too much. My mother died when I was four and I really don’t remember her, but she passed away when I was four. My father lived until ’38 - - 1938 and we had a uncle that was married to a Polish woman, a more, ah , aristocratic or something, you know. So there was, ah, let’s see, three brothers and three sisters; three brother from a first wife, three sisters from second wife. My father remarried when his first wife died and so then I was the youngest in the family. So, ah, my mother died too. Now, ah, as I remember, as growing up --- I must have been, ah, eight, even, eight when they gave me to, to that uncle as their daughter because they didn’t have any children. So, I was going to be, you know, go to school and have a family. Of course, my father was sick then, he didn’t die yet but he was sick so . . and the brothers were, I don’t want to use the wrong word, but, ah, beating all the time on, on us younger kids from the second marriage, you know. As a stepmother, they, they beat her actually to death. This way she died. That’s what my father after told me and my sister told me because I didn’t know, being so young.

Q: You were four when your mother died?

A: Yes.

Q: What year was that?

A: Ah, it must have been, it must have been in, ah, ’30 –1930 – or something like that. My father died in, ah, 1938.

Q: And you were about eight then?

A: I was, ah, I don’t know how old I was. I really don’t know. I don’t even know how old I am today. I know that I’m going

I know when I met my husband in Germany, ah, I had to be - - he had to make me, he was American officer. I had to be - - I had to be a little older.

Q: Oh, so he made you older?

A: Because, the - - he made me older. So maybe I, I don’t know, but anyway, now I’m going back. Ah, I was being adopted, having it pretty good. I even started school for a couple of months. Then I got the mumps, or whatever, then so I didn’t go to school. Now comes 1939. The Germans coming in, over Czechoslovakia on – we were just on the border – Czechoslovakian border and living there. And so, ah, the home that I am now adopted, ah, is elegant home - -not what kind we lived in, you know, in the small town because we were poor. So, the Germans were – all came in, and as I say, I don’t know how old I was – a officer had attacked me and raped me. I must have been either ten or twelve or eleven. I really don’t know because I didn’t have a period yet – so then only I know that, that of us. Now, they tied my uncle and my aunt and he is raping me in front of them. Well, they can’t untie himself. When my father –my uncle – my father, who – I called him father already. He somehow, I don’t know, from anger or something, ah, untied himself and he came to the back with a knife. He didn’t kill him but he hurt him. Well, of course, then I am already raped, blood all over --- I don’t know what is, what is, you know, just unconscious – like unconscious – so they shot my father and my mother right there in front of me. And it took me some, some kind of barracks, that I was lying there, hurt, and I thought the whole gut went out of me – and just kicked around and, ah, I don’t know, ah – they were debating whether to kill me too because the officer is, of course, hurt. If I only could, could have killed him myself. So, ah, then of course, to Germany. So, on a, ah, quite a few young kids – but not as young as I was – quite a few seventeen, fifteen, eighteen – into the, ah, train --- into the -- like a cattle train – and we were going maybe five, seven days, I don’t know – stop here and there and no food, ah, nothing to eat. But, ah, in it – in the train, straw and manure, and, ah, nothing to eat. But, ah, before I left there was only one way topping – that was stopping – when somebody would claim me and the brothers didn’t want to have nothing to do.

Q: How did they know were you were?

A: The brothers?

Q: You brothers.

A: They were living right around.

Q: Oh, you all lived nearby?

A: Nearby.

Q: You father had moved with you to the – near your uncle?

A: No. My father stayed in my, ah, in our old home what was called Stulnitza. We went to Sanuck (?), which is, ah, just, ah, maybe half an hour with the train or something.

QL Oh, it was very close?

A: Very close, yeah. If they would come and claim me that they take this kid, and they protect me, and ah, you know, make it some kind of arrangement – those officers, with those German Nazis, that’s what they were – it would have probably worked because I would have been in a protect. But I’m - now, just kicked – they just kicked me. This one, all this then wanted me that a second and – I’m one of the youngest that is still alive now in Poland. He didn’t want me. Then nobody wanted me, I’m just a – just throw me like a cattle – so, we went.

Q: What happened to your sisters? The couldn’t claim you either?

A: No, sisters were all, ah – one was married and, ah, everybody was – when the war started, everybody was just being moving – that direction – she had two kids and she had mother-in-law and they lived all together at the – marriage was arranged, you know. So is not so, ah, it wasn’t so easy for her to, to take me. The second one was never married. She just, she tried to be a singer or something. She was roaming around here and there and – all over, and it’s a – I could never, I actually never – good, had a good relationship of had a handhold with her, ah, protection or any ah, nothing, nothing.

Q: Were they all much older than you?

A: Yes, I was the youngest.

Q: Was there a big age difference between you?

A: Yes. Between my middle sister and me there is a gap of, ah, eight years, because there was, there was supposedly another – a son, a son or something that died in birth or something like that. And, ah, then I was born. And I was supposedly as, as now, as my husband has on the paper --- I was born in 1925.

Q: How much time elapsed between the rape and being sent off on the train?

A: Ehh, not much, matter of weeks. But I’m, I’m, I’m still sick, you know. I’m, ah, ah, I think in about, ah, time when we arrived to Germany I am, ah, being now expected, because they don’t know what, what to do with me. An, ah – I am young and a, there was some – I didn’t understand German to – they wanted to, ah, put me in some institution or what to do with me. So, anyway, I was being expected and, ah, and something given to the mob or shot, or something – I don’t know – something like that. But, ah, I being to feel better. It must have been, must have been about – now is about four to five weeks.

Q: Did you brothers and your . . know where .. I mean, you said it was about a half hour away. How did they know what had happened to you?

A: At that particular time, they didn’t. But at, right after, right after when the, ah, my parents are shot – well, the brothers didn’t care about my parents being shot because there is no relation to them – ah, is, is his, is their uncle alright, as my father’s brother. That’s, that’s – but they didn’t, you know, they didn’t care for them, ah, at all. They did find out that they shot them and that’s the particular time that they wanted to stay away from the whole thing. They didn’t want – they don’t want to get mixed up. They were already hinting towards the German side, you know, there is nothing, thank God, the Germans had arrived and, ah, maybe they could clean up – ah, they didn’t – you know, those Ukrainians they didn’t like Polish –Polacks, they didn’t like Jews, they didn’t like Russians, ah, they didn’t, didn’t even like German. But when the German came they were – HA HA HA German – oh, there was just like a -- and they seemed like they joined with German.

Q: Yes, the Ukrainians did welcome the Germans.

A: Yeah, and I, I, ah, heard after that they weren’t – the didn’t even pay, paid attention – but I give a word if they would take me or they would talk to those officers, ah, to those, ah SS over there, but they were, you know, protect me. No, they, they didn’t want to – they didn’t want to make any fuss because, ah – take her, she’s yours.

Q: Did they . . do you think they might have been trying to hide the fact that they were Jewish?

A: My . . .

Q: Your brothers?

A: But they were not Jewish.

Q: Oh.

A: They were not Jewish.

Q: I see.

A: They were not Jewish. No. I, I was not born Jewish. I was – no, I married, married a Jewish man. No, not – they were – I was not Jewish. That’s why I want to tell you, ah, when I was, ah, attacked and there were Jewish – just one family in this little town – ah, they were, they were attacked the same way as, you know, they, they got shot, they got, ah, ah, same way as from this town as, ah – even the priest got shot – which is, ah, Greek or Orthodox or some stuff like that. Even he got shot. So, ah, because he was – he thought he can control everybody, you know. He will, you’ll just come and he will bless you and you are controlled already, whatever, you now. The Germans, they didn’t pay attention to that stuff. So, ah, alright – we’re in Germany now. You want to go back someway, you want to ask me something?

Q: No, lets . . . it took about seven days, you said to get to Germany?

A: To Germany, yeah. Well, I am in some kind of, ah, some kind of, is the barrack or is a big hall and kept us there for days, weeks, you know, to, as I say, doctor, doctor came and examined everybody. Everybody is hungry, not washed, not . .

Q: You’re really young people?

A: This is all the young people.

Q: Young people.

A: Young people. Ah, even I, ah – from Sanuck (?) – even Jewish, young girls attacked – they are with me. Matter of fact, they were with me in Regensburg. So, ah, they kept us and then they put us somewhere when they separated. And, we let into the factory and I remember making some kind of wooden boxes. And you have to do fast, fast, fast, -- and that was just for about a couple of weeks or so. Then you get kicked because you’re not making – you’re not drilling the hole fast enough. Or you get kicked, you get punched, you get, ah, ah, staring at you, ah, you’re just, ah, dead, -- don’t stare back – you look down – why you look down. It’s, it’s ah, honestly like a --like they would have a some kind of rock (?) there – that would strike them. No, I just wanted to be left alone, so did others. And so, time came that – load on the truck and we’re going now to Regensburg. Now this separated few from me that, that they were, that I would like them to be with me. But there was five Jewish girls, ah, some Polish girls -- I don’t know – they were not from my area. Some Ukrainian, some Czechoslovakian, and we are now set for, going to concentration camp – Regensburg. So, they load us up on the truck and, ah, and it, ah – Regensburg, the barracks – and, ah, huge electric thing – oh, what you call that, a . . .

Q: A gate?

A: Gate opens. And when it dropped down everybody is off the truck and going into the shower, cleaning off – that they called them delousing. So, they checked everybody through. Now I had a, ah, and so did other girls had, ah, long hair. I don’t know – I know we didn’t have any lice, but they automatically shaved it. That’s your punishment. Shave. And, ah, so while you to … they, they shaving and ah, test you and test you—and I mean the hall is long and it was shaving everybody, and everybody is just ah, ah, I felt. . . and now you’ve taken away everything from me. I mean, first I was raped – now you’ve taken my hair – and I, I don’t know what’s next. And thoughts came back – family, where? Ah, the family, that they couldn’t protect me. It just --- when is my future, where is, where am I going? Nothing, that just went too. So, now you are just, ah, like a, a little animal, And, ah, they kind of, they kind of waited around and --- un a big hole to be examined again – we’re going in front of – and there were lines – naked – and we’re going to the doctors, you know, we’re going to be examined. What work we should we do in there? Who is suited for, for kind of work? So, we went through that – well, we to the hole – we went to the doctors, they say … you’re naked, you stand at this one – is naked – it kind of embarrassed – and, ah, ah, I fainted. I just collapsed. There was no food. They didn’t give you anything to eat. The train was no food. They just kicked and, and, ah, you know – stepped on the foot, it’s just ah, -- I wouldn’t do that to the cattle, or to the dogs – I, I don’t know – just push and punch and kick and whatnot. Alright, ah, and no food.

Q: How many days were you there?

A: In, in Inguaia (?)

Q: At that point, you say you hadn’t had food on the train, you didn’t have food and . .

A: Oh, that’s about seven days.

Q: Without food?

A: Without food. Ah . . .

Q: What about water?

A: They give you a dirty water, yeah. Ah, they did, I mean, a food, a – like the train had stopped in Krakow, I remember, that was Krakow – and somebody starts throwing a crust of bread and we, you know, grabbing for the crust of bread. Ah, some of us ha got it but it was stale and so, and anyway, you, you eat it. And, ah, and then one, ah, man came around and, ah, he had asked information of he can give everybody bread. One Polack, I guess. And, ah, they did give us some bread. So that’s what, but they had a, a filthy water like it rained – that’s, that’s what they scooped in the little barrels. Ah, and that’s what they give as your drink, from, ah, like in a cowboy thing – from one ladle, one ladle to another as … no washing. Ah, you go to the bathroom to one corner, ah, on the straw --- and, ah, you avoid to sleep in this, if is not enough room --- ah, you might as well forget it – you got to sleep there too. So, that’s --- you just, you just go, that’s all. There’s no, no out letting, no, no – none.

Q: And when they took you on the trucks to Regensburg, was it along trip or a short trip?

A: Yeah. That was, I remember that when loaded up, I, ah, in the morning about, ah, six --- we didn’t arrive there until next morning, six o’clock. Some, I don’t know, I think the truck stopped somewhere or, or they, they unloaded us – no, they unloaded the truck. They unloaded in some kind of area that is, ah, also like a big hall or something. And we stayed in there – they just packed us in --- and the next morning, ah, we have to – I didn’t even know what a count, on a – get up on a count --- you know, on a counting. So, they loaded – you go – or, whatever at this point. Get up and just --- back on the trucks. There was, ah, there must have been about, ah, ten trucks coming from every direction. But, we stopped and that every truck stopped in that …

Q: In a central warehouse.

A: Yeah. So, ah, then we arrived about, mmmm – no, it was later – because, ah, by the time they load us into the truck – it wasn’t far anymore. But, ah, as I heard from somebody that then they did not want us to be there, only because SS, a certain, a boss wasn’t there until nine or ten o’clock, something like that, so, ah, he had to count the trucks, count how many people, and, ah, report it to the, to the big cheese there. So then, you, we got, ah, shaved – doctor, examined – and they tell you which barracks: 1A Barracks, 2A Barracks, and so on – and barracks, and barracks. They were on a row –barracks as far as you can see --- Barracks – and either side – Barracks. So, what they gonna do with …. Whoever gonna work? What we gonna work? Some of them they put on, ah, woods work –chopping wood. Some of them, factory. Some of them, ah, ah, gas chamber, what they in charge, because they were not going to, you know, stand the whole night, whatever. Some of them, ah, police work. On the streets, some of them were cleaning streets. Some of them in charged of the people in the barracks, there’s four women that, ah, in charge and take all – that Polack, a black woman. You know – what you have to look up to her and you have, whatever. They were already there.

Q: They were there.

A: They were there. They were already there. It seems to me that, ah …

Q: Were they older people?

A: They were older women, yeah. And they were all Polish. And, ah, they were Polish and then some Russian arrived and, ah, the Polish older women at, ah – they was, they were --- they were mean – they were absolutely mean! Now, Russian women that they had in there – nice, hefty – they would, they beat us. Ah, and ah …

Q: they were also prisoners, through, weren’t they?

A: Yes. They would beat us. And they would, ah, they would, ah, report us --- to tel you what the others --- what, what do you call them, ah …

Q: Like spies?

A: Spies! Squealers. Yeah, for anything – for a piece of bread, for good . . .whatever. So, they kind of got us through the hall. It seems like the whole barrack is waiting. Everything is there like it would be there for a hundred of years. There, it, it was so organized – it was so, ah, ah, patrolled, ah, it like -- I don’t understand – like somebody was there for fifty years already, really. And, of course, I’m a kid and I, I just – well, what, what do they gonna give me to work ---because I have to work. So they put me --- I was healthy girl.

Q: You’re all of twelve years old …

A: Maybe.

Q: Maybe.

A: Yeah. So, they put me in the kitchen. Oh, I, that’s my job --- in the kitchen. I mean, not just my job – there were about three hundred girls that work – that we – cooking, but that, all at the barracks.

Q: How many people were there?

A: I cannot tell you.

Q: It was a big camp?

A: I, I cannot tell you because they, ah – when we were there about, ah, two and a half year, they already started building a new kitch --- a new barracks – new kitchen for the – the calling that they needed two kitchens. The old kitchen is, is, cannot feed all of the --- so they, they were building, ah, another barracks. And that was all filled up. And, ah, ah, remembering --- they were so full that some of them did not have a place to sleep in the barracks. They were on the outside --- like wired in. And, ah, they pull a shelter when it’s raining. But the – just like the cattle …

Q: There were like bunks outside?

A: Yes

Q: And when it was cold you were just out of luck?

A: They --- you were just out of luck. Oh, yeah – they would just, ah, stay, ah – frightened – stick together, body to body, or standing, or lying, or sitting, or, or . . .

Q: How many people were in a barrack?

A: In a barrack? Okay. The beds – let me see --- the beds --- one, two, three, on, on a --- then one, two, three, they are together and each bed – they are --- the beds are together like, like a --- on this side is corridor – you step in at this side, is corridor. So, you have two people – you have four people down, sleeping down – six people, eight people. . .

Q: So, on the top you have eight people and the next one has four people?

A: No, no.

Q: You had four, two and two?

A: They had – the beds were wooden, narrow, but they’re straw. It’s only one person can sleep, really. But they put two in each bed. So there was four, four, and four.

Q: So it’s a dozen in one bed. Twelve people.

A: Right. That’ right.

Q: Twelve people in each bed that should hold . . .

A: Now, in each barrack it’s dozen. In each barrack, ah, about twenty-four beds like that. Twenty-four beds – this way. But, with

Q: How many rows?

A: Rows? Yeah. And you have a little ladder to go on the top, okay. Um, ah, width was one, two, three, four – six. Six width.

Q: And twenty-four long?

A: Twenty-four long.

Q: And twelve to a … twelve times twenty-four times six.

A: Okay.

Q: That’s a lot of people.

A: In, in that one barracks --- that’s just my barrack, now. That’s, that’s a – in some barracks – the new ones that they built – it was even longer and a little wider. So, there must have been, ah --- and they didn’t have the room for that. So, now, ah, now can we stop for a while, pleas?

Q: Certainly

Q: We figured out there were seventeen hundred forty people in a barracks. That’s just one barrack.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you have any special friends in the barracks? You mentioned that you came with some girls that you wanted to stay with.

A: They won’t let you be friendly, no. When they see you, ah, friendly, ah, they, ah, they, ah, will saying that we are plotting something—planning something. Now I got friendly with one, ah, woman that was, ah, from , ah, Vienna – a Jewish woman. She was very elegant woman, and a doctor. And she was obstetrician. And she happened to, ah, had a -- for some girl – abortion, what they called it, you know, in Germany – you can, you can have an abortion – you understand me?

Q: Yes.

A: Hitler didn’t want any abortion, I mean . .

Q: No. He wanted children.

A: Yep. And so, this way she was there and ..

Q: She was not Jewish?

A: She was Jewish.

Q: She wasn’t a merchant . . .

A: She was Jewish. But she was ah, ah, doctor. And they had, they really had their respect for her. They had used her with the German in that they had sometime, ah, call her in on this, on a certain … like one time a girl climbed over a, ah, electric wire and, ah, she got electrocuted. But she ah, they respect. So I got friendly with her and, ah, some little sneak, ah, had said that we trying to escape --- or something like that. So, she said just stay away from each other, that’s all. They can’t, they can’t – you can’t have a friend, no. Um, that was not, ah – you can’t even, ah, talk to each other – is, you know --- because it, it is not a kindergarten. You’re not running like hand-to-hand – you, know, so you survive tonight. And so, it’s just a – sort of goes day after day, I’m still alive. I’m, ah, I survived. I get a piece of bread. Well, okay. Now I’m working in the kitchen. Kitchen is, ah, --- the stove’s as round as this table outside, ah, higher.

Q: It’s about a thirty-six inch table.

A: They are metal outside. You open the part --- you feed the wood. So that is my job – to sit – those stoves – big stoves --- sit on a, on a ridge so that when you let the water out of soup – drip catch – that goes . . .

Q: Runs off.

A: Runs off. You know, ah, like, like this . . ah, I can’t explain it, ah . . .each stove . . now ---a--- oven. Each girl had one oven. So, there were at --- you’re assigned, one girl is assigned to it. That is your stove. You cook. You --- or whatever. There are another girls that are, ah, peeling vegetables, ah --- let’s say peeling, there was nothing peeled – it’s just . .they did wash them. Ah, like, um, those white brown things that you give to the cattle here.

Q: Turnips?

A: Turnips – they wash them. Some carrots – the hose them, wash them --- deliver them upstairs. Well, not few steps up to, to the, to our kitchen. We let the water in. We throw the carrots and turnip in, and ah, you have some salt in the, in the big containers there. You, you measure, and you throw it in. It’s big – you have a little step ladder. And big wooden thing --- you keep mixing. But, ah, what are you mixing? Is hardly anything in it. I see just a couple cuts of carrots and the green from the carrots, you know, that is left. In it, a couple of turnips and the green from the turnips, and you mix it. And you, you cook that, and you cook that until, oh, almost to nothing, so it comes out to a soup. Now each girl is doing that. Now, maybe, ah, you want to know how many, ah stoves there were. There were rows: one, two, three, four, four rows. And, ah fifties, or fifty long.

Q: There were two hundred stoves.

A: Yeah. So, each girl had this stove. Now, it comes to let the soup out. You have a spigot, like wine, a spigot --- and, ah, to a pail. And then comes in like, a a you know those old milk containers?

Q: The great big milk cans?

A: Big cans. Milk cans. That’s right, yeah --- fill them up, load them up on a truck, and deliver --- that’s morning. Oh, I’m going to go back – as soon as I finish that first day. That morning is – there’s no coffee or anything --- it’s that, that kind of – a soup. Each person has his own metal --- like a cup, yeah. And, you fill them up so, ah, not thicker than this – and bread – and that’s your, that’s your ration now, okay. That’s your ration until evening. You don’t get more than that.

Q: A thin slice of bread?

A: That’s right. That’s right. In the, in the afternoon you get nothing. That’s in the morning. Now, as I’m going back to a job – well, it is cooked and that is delivered --- it’s kind --- you have to clean the oven, ah, clean he ---everything --- wash everything, ah, the floor and everything and fill up with the water for noon – things to go in. so, new things to go in, ah, we wonder what is new things to go in --- so --- it’s the same damn thing.

Q: The turnips and the carrots

A: The turnips – and this time it wasn’t carrot, this time it was, ah, potato – but with the peels and everything – just washed. And you boil it and the whole thing. Yeah, there was no potato peeled, ever --- which was alright, maybe – because come to a potato peeling at …So that was going on day after day, you know, a routine. You go, you go now to the barracks, ah, you, ah, clean off- you shower off – which there was a shower outside like a, like a – not hot water or cold water – right outside the barracks. So, you rinse. You go to bed. Then in the morning you get up but it – bugle calls – on the count – four o’clock. So, you have to be all accounted. Each goes their direction to work, whatever it is. We go to the kitchen. In the kitchen you have to start at five o’clock with this cooking business to – so that the barrack is fed by . . .

Q: Did you have to build your own fired?

A: Yes, yes. And the SS woman, women, on each between the walking back and forth work and whip and whip and whip --- it’s just like, like a --- something on the air, sometime get you. On the one time, I, I didn’t pay attention so she gave me a hot poker and branded me --- right there.

Q: On you calf. On you leg.

A: On the calf. So, because I didn’t turn fast enough, you know, she, ah, had said something and I didn’t turn fast enough. So, that goes on a day after day. There’s no Sunday. There’s no – then, maybe, now we’re coming to a little meat. And that, that nightmare, it stopped for a while, ah, until …

END OF SIDE A

Q: You said, “Meat”

A: Yeah, meat. And there was meat --- when I was pulling mean into this pot, there was a human hands, a human feet – that was the meat. As, as I say, I still have a nightmare. I see eating a person, standing live person --- that’s what the nightmare is. Now that was just once in a while.

Q: Yes.

A: But it’s, it’s cooking ---it’s cooked. And I, I know I put them in there. I put them in there. Now, I am getting up in the morning. I wonder who am I’m going to eat next because every morning the --- there is like a logs – piled up with the dead people. Ah, and you stand on a count, you know, on this, on the count you look behind you --- the high, high, from yea to there --- are dead people. And I wonder whether, you know, well

Q: Stacked up.

A: Stacked Up. On top of another. Like, a like a . . .

Q: Like logs.

A: Like logs. That started about three weeks later, when I was there. Not at first. I didn’t see it or didn’t I pay it attention, or, ah, maybe I I go. Day after day it’s, it’s a same thing. Like a logs, and, and that’s what we were --- once in a while – getting it. We did get it Christmas. We did get a horse. Yeah, we did get a horse, but not the, not the part that is better horse, you know – legs and the bones --- so it gives you a flavor. And, ah, nostril and the head --- you know, chopped up on a --- with the bones.

Q: No steaks.

A: No steaks.

A: No, no. So, anyway, as I am in the kitchen --- as I was gonna say before about peeling potatoes, the girl --- girls brought, ah, potatoes and, ah, one potato --- as she’s dumping --- one potato, one potato fell over and I looked around and I picked it up and I’m holding that potato instead of throwing it in, you know, I am going to eat that raw potato. And she caught me eating that raw potato.

Q: The SS lady caught you.

A: Yeah. She caught me and she – the punishment was twenty-five whips on the rear end and standing for three days in a tank of water. You go into that tank with a, in – on ah, on a ladder, you know.

Q: Ummm, A ladder.

A: Yeah. Then they take the ladder away and you’re standing there in the water --- about to here --- the water is getting higher – and you’re standing there for three days. You’re thirsty, you drink it --- you got to go to the bathroom --- you do it. Eat nothing. That’s the punishment.

Q: And the water was almost up to your hips.

A: Yeah. So, you want to sleep --- in that waters --- go and drown. Okay. For three days. And you want to, so much, get even with somebody. Who do you get even with for that punishment? --- that you get in a . . . You’re hungry now and she’s watching you double now. You must – I’m still in the kitchen.

Q: Mmmm.

A: They didn’t, ah, they didn’t move me to the, to the different jobs --- I’m still in the kitchen. But watching --- my God, when, when you even stand over on the ladder on your mixing table she is just watching, and, ah, with this stare, you know. Just make a wrong move, you gonna, you gonna get it --- and I, I know it. That when, that when month after month year after year, same, same damn thing --- eating human once in a while, horse, ah – or frightened oh, ah, tomorrow your time comes. And so my time came. I am called to the gas chamber.

Q: Do you have any idea how long this was after you got there?

A: Oh, maybe two years now. I’m . . same thing – behave yourself, Ilona, behave yourself, even if they, they --- when . . even when you, ah, behaved yourself they, they somehow found more reason. You walked, ah, the way she didn’t like it. So, then she put it, put you against her for four hours, against the wall, and you, and you stand like that- four hours.

Q: You stand on your tiptoes with your hands leaning against the wall .. .

A: Right. Against the wall . .

Q: Leaning against the wall, but just with your fingers.

A: . . with the fingers – just with the fingers, not, not like that --- and on the toes. So, you know, it, it day, day after day you’re worried. You know, this is a bad punishment too . .

Q: Yes.

A: Just for, ah, for walking, for walking wrong. Because she didn’t like it the way you walked, or the way you were, the way you, ah, were mixing. Maybe, the – it should have done it this way instead of this way. It, ah, it – to picked on you for, for no reason at all. Ah, of course, as, as kids, ah coming into the, ah, bathroom – and so, ah, they didn’t have the toilet paper, I know, they had some kind of a brown stuff, and, ah, we tried to roll it and smoke it we were so hungry.

Q: mmmmmm

A: So we, you know, that was, that was alright until somebody snitched. So, ah, -- because when you’re hungry and you smoke, it kills your appetite. You know, it kills – when we were really inhaling that brown paper. Ah, ah, there were not trees, there were not one tree or one shrub in there because, ah, they were afraid that somebody might hang themselves on a trees or something. There was nothing that, ah . . .But, ah, they forgot to remove it someplace, a, little bed of, with grass --- so we dried the grass from, ah, from, ah, you know, by the barracks . . .

Q: Just some plain grass?

A: Yeah, and ah, put it in the paper, and, ah . .

Q: Smoked it?

A: Smoked it, smoked it, yeah . . .until, ah, they removed the whole grass. There was no – there was just sand all over now. There’s not grass. No. Except on a --- where SS live and ah, Polish women are cooing for the SS. That’s, ah, not a barracks. That’s another gate. You gotta go through the gate. So, you have to know somebody in there, or who is cooking for the SS, ah, To bring you a little grass. But, what can you give her for that? “Did you bring any jewelry?” Now, ah, as I – they took every jewelry. That they even, they even took the – when the jewelry didn’t go out --- I seen it, I seen they chopped the fingers.

Q: mmmmmm

A: They took the whole thing. The knocked the gold off. I’ve seen . . .

Q: From the teeth?

A: Yeah. From the teeth. Because, ah, I did also had a friend that worked, ah, where that --- Jewelry is kept. So, she had --- matter of fact --- she had a, a plates from somebody that, that they just, you know . . .

Q: They just pulled out?

A: They just pulled that and, and the whole thing out. Whatever jewelry I, I had, ah --- I know I had a, a watch from my aunt that she gave me and I had that when we left. That was gone. And some broach – because, ah, that was something that she gave me and I kept --- that, that was gone. And my papers --- I don’t know what --- ah, they took my papers. Then all of a sudden it came – they’re going to transfer us somewhere. They transfer me, us somewhere . . So right now, I don’t know if you want to keep asking me what is going on in between, it’s the same thing . .

Q: You had mentioned something about the gas chamber.

A: Oh, yeah. Oh, I forgot about that. They had, ah --- one time they, ah, same for me and, ah . . . My maiden name was Orlanzga (?) Polanzka, Polanzka, and so I’m going on the, ah – quite a few of us --- and we are going to certain building. And I keep asking – what is all about it? And, ah, one woman says, “Oh, they just want to question --- they just want to … there’s nothing to it” One girl behind me, she said, “No, no – I know that building . . it’s a gas chamber” Well, anyway, we have no choice. We just keep going, one after, you know – not one after another – by four, by four, by – but we’re going in it. We entered I there. There were --- everything, locks. So, so far we have a, a green light – green light, green light. Well, everybody says, “Well, when it’s a green light, it’s good. But when that red light comes then it’s – you’re finished” So, they killing themselves. They all, they, they banging their head against anything and they killing . . they’re just screaming – they’re crying, ah, ah, whatnot. Then they – it didn’t take long for a person to be beaten by, by, by himself against a thing that they had in there. So, all of a sudden the – kind of door opens and, ah, my name is called. And somebody else name is called --- about the same age – about five of us. And we got out. And, ah, about seventy-five or eighty of, of them --- they were

Q: Gassed?

A: They were gassed. They were finished. No one could get out. We got to that particular office and, ah, he, ah – that SS is sitting there. He said, ah, “You want to live” Well, we said, “Yeah” We want to live. “Then you must do this. You must become Volks Deutcha (?)” You must become German, and raise children” So, the other girls, the said, “I’d rather be dead” And I said, “Your officer raped me. I can no longer have a children because he tore everything from inside of me, and I can’t have any children” So what are we going to keep you for? You’ve got to die. So they were discussing . . calling back and forth – they examined me. They couldn’t show anything enough, by the doctors, that I couldn’t have children. Now, how could they – how did they gonna prove that I’m don’t going to have a child? I didn’t have it sex yet, or anything, after this. Ah, so, anyway they kind of left it, ah --- one big shot came from somewhere, and I mean, and he just said, ah, that, “It’s alright, we’ll decide after what we gonna do with her or with those that don’t want to become Germans” So then we going to the transfer. Now, it took us about ten days to walk.

Q: You walked?

A: Walked. By four, by four. Line is just like a, a river. I don’t know where we’re going. Day and Day --- night we stopped – and going again wherever we, we went --- we got there—it was either Buchenwald or Sachsenhausen or, ah, I ah, Auspen (?) – I don’t know where it was, but it was very, very, very ah, ah frightening. So, they couldn’t ---we set there for three nights now. They couldn’t accept us because they were overloaded. So, we set – we sitting like a --- ants on top of a hill and on top of another, and we’re / / /

Q: How many of you were there that were marching?

A: How many? Oh, I, I, ah, can’t tell you. Must have been about, ah, good four to five hundred of us.

Q: All women?

A: All, all the women. Yeah.

Q: How old were you about this time?

A: Now, that’ about – okay, when I’m ah, ah, when I’m --- let’s say when I’m twelve, ah – I must be going on, ah, I must be fourteen now. Must be fourteen. Yeah, I must be fourteen because, ah, I already got my period in there. So I must be . . .

Q: At Regensburg.

A: At Regensburg, yeah. I must be fourteen. And that’s my first period. So, they, they rejected. They didn’t ah, they didn’t want us. They didn’t feed us. They would just, ah, got turned and march back again.

Q: To Regensburg.

A: To Regensburg. Four, Four days.

Q: No food?

A: No food. No food. No, uh uh. That way we could . . we were going through the woods of some know, you know, ah, a path that is grass you, ah there’s some – believe me, there is grass, some edible. I, I can, ah, show you. Few leaves that is, ah, really edible. Ah, and I, I remember is very – it’s hot, it’s very hot – and you, you keep going. Ah, and, ah, shoes, ah give up – whatever shoes we had because there was, a just a, a bunch of rags on our feet and the were bleeding and, ah, hungry and, ah, marching. So four nights we were there. Fourth night back. Now, we’re coming back – fourth night. They got us all in a --- some kind of valley . .

Q: In a valley.

A: In a valley, ah, like ah, like right on the grass and, ah, I was with a girl that --- remember I have told you that they chopped the, to cut her leg – well, she was going on, on a crutch. So, I said to her, “Let’s go over on the side here where maybe we find some grass to eat” And, ah, she said she can’t, she can’t walk. And so, we just kind of stayed together and, ah, when we got back they already had murdered about two hundred in that area. It just – pile, pile --- they, they just lying dead. Dead – shot.

Q: They marching-gunned them.

A: Yeah. They machine-gunned them. And so, some other comes in with a big, a horse or something. And he, he found, and, ah – he said --- just leave, leave those dead and we go back – we’ll march back to Regensburg.

Q: back in the kitchens?

A: Same. Yeah. Same thing. Except that girl that had a – one leg—she, ah, they – for some reason – they beat her with twenty-five whips, and ah, she just, she just, they killed her. She just died because next morning on a counting at --- of five --- four o’clock – but five o’clock is lighter already --- I had seen her head, and see one leg . .I mean, that’ where she was. So, we working again and same thing. Day after day – if you’re going to be --- you know, if you’re going to be alive or, ah what they gonna do, ah, to you. And, ah, food didn’t matter anymore, you know, it was, it was – food was this way, ah – the factory, the girls get not – the kitchen girls after --- and the, the kitchen girls will give them a little, a little portion of a bread and they will get like, ah, jewelry back maybe.

Q: Oh

A: And they give them . .

Q: Like you trade?

A: Like you trade, yeah. So, it goes on now . .

Q: What about clothing?

A: Clothing—we, we had a , ah, stripe blue and white skirts and, ah, a blue and, ah, some stripe, ah a tops – little blouse – and a jacket when it’s cooler. And they kept, ah, shaving my hair soon as it start growing. They just kept shaving. And I got a beating – after that, ah, ah, Ah, I got beating, ah, once every three months for two years.

Q: To remind you.

A: To yea. Twenty-five whips.

Q: No more water?

A: No more water. That was, that was only, only that once, water. But they give me whip, whips, Okay . .

Q: How long did this go on? Until the liberation?

A: Until the liberation, yeah.

Q: Can you tell us about the liberation, Mrs. Stein?

A: Okay.

Q: When did you first have an idea that something might change? Was there any differences in the way you were treated?

A: No. NO. There was no difference. There was just, ah --- I left the concentration camp behind. People were screaming because they were- - those that didn’t stay in the barracks – ah, that I was standing that day outside. They were murdered off. They were killed off. Ah, we going on another transportation now. The transfer now, now is us all over again. Somewhere. Now we don’t know where. It, ah, it is almost triple now. There was five hundred – about four or five hundred before, now it’s triple.

Q: Like fifteen, sixteen hundred?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Being transported.

A: Transported --- all over again. And so, we’re going to some kind of woods to --- we’re going, ah, again – not hungry, I mean hungry --- and don’t know where – and they whipping you, and there are more of them, ah, on the side. And, ah, ah, we head liberation. We heard that --- gunshots. We heard the, ah, that somebody is coming because --- honest to God, I don’t know whether today is Saturday, or Sunday or Monday. I don’t know what day it is --- or what date it is. I know there is a, there s a, you know, I’m almost here five years.

Q: That’s right.

A: I’m a – you know, I don’t have any, any schooling yet. I don’t have any – nothing – I am working hard and I have --- am I surviving? Or --- I survived, so far. Now I thought that’s – the end is coming now. We’re going whenever we’re going. But they took us into the woods. We went – the shots were coming and there was five girls, or six. And we rolled, we kept rolling in the grass. We kept rolling. Each time he’s standing like in back of you, you’re a little further, you’re a little more away from that . .

Q: From the guard?

A: From the guard. And they caught us. They were changing their uniforms and putting on us . .

Q: Their uniforms?

A: And they, and they were dressing themselves and, in our unif, in our uniforms, what we had.

Q: Like prisoner uniforms.

A: That’s right. And then they killed the whole, the whole, I mean whole flock of . .

Q: In their uniforms.

A: In their uniforms

Q: Yeah, Yeah. How did you escape? How did you . . ?

A: Ah, roll . .

Q: By rolling away?

A: Rolling, rolling, rolling. Rolling, crawling. Crawling on the belly. Being quite – lie still. When you – when they get you, they get you – but ah, maybe you have a chance. There is a little rock and you go behind it. There is a little bush, you go behind it. You made sure that there was not too much woods because somebody might hide. There was a valley, clean valley, so that they seen everybody. And we were just on a, like a little mountain in the middle. So five of us were rolling --- like that--- rolling off. And believe it or not, they were—they disappeared. They were gone. There, there was no more SS. There was nobody there. The shots were coming too close.

Q: And they ran. Were you in your own uniform or had they changed . . What were you wearing?

A: I, ah --- no. They didn’t – they, they, ah, they had left me because I start rolling before. . .

Q: So you were in the prison uniform.

A: I was in the prison uniform, yeah. So, we all – all the five of us were. And, ah, they were, I mean they just – BBBBBBBB – and then they’re running. Lay down. Now we don’t know where to go. We don’t know what is happening. Like, ah, we- we felt lost. I mean, where – are we going back to, to Regensburg? Or, or where do we go? Do we go free? That they might get us. They might catch us. Then another group came. They got us with this group. When – you know that, know that the other group, that they, they didn’t know that – like they didn’t see anything. But to Regensburg.

Q: And you were caught and taken back to Regensburg?

A: Yep. Go back to Regensburg. Well, there’s a punishment again. Punishment that we’re all facing. The others – dead. But is entirely different group now.

Q: Mmmmm.

A: They left with our uniforms, but I see the face – well, he’s already in the, in the uniform – he’s --- they’re there already. She is there already. SS women.

Q: MMMM

A: Ah, changed already. It, it, it was just like a, a nightmare --- like you’re dreaming --- and yet … I know I saw, I saw it. Then all of a sudden you here, or is it double. Or, or . . . it was so strange. So, we got through the punishment --- all over again. And there’s another move set there for awhile --- working again, you know. And we go, ah, feeding now a, ah, men concentration camp. There was a --- that we never knew. Over the wall, which is a high, high wall, ah --- cement wall, some kind of – and, ah …

Q: You’re not at Regensburg anymore?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Oh, yeah, they’re back at Regensburg . . yes, it was separated.

A: There are, ah, men, ah, over there. We bring in the with a, with a truck, we bring in the food over there.

Q: mmm

A: And, ah, ah, that’s the first time, you know, we see there is a men, ah, ah, also in there and --- but we didn’t see them before. It seems like, ah, I don’t know ---they didn’t, maybe didn’t care if we mix anymore or not but was not allowed to mix. I thought maybe they can, maybe we can talk or something. And, so, it wasn’t --- which was --- that’s a first time and last time. We brought that food over and we didn’t see --- we didn’t go there again. Maybe other groups brought it, or something, but I didn’t because I was transferred again.

Q: Waling through the woods again.

A: Walking. This time walking through the town, woods, and ah, whenever and ah, where we were going and going and tired and hungry and beaten, beaten, and, ah, screamed at and pushed at and picked at and you, you, you just about crawl. Then we came to a small town and there is a wagon kind of parked – this way – and we going this way by four. A long, long while. And, again, on each side the --- there is, ah, SS men and SS women. Ah, you know, with the guns and so on.

Q: To keep you in line.

A: That. To keep in line. And I, you know, I’d, I’d just, I just turned --- not a girl --- I said she was, ah, ah, from Vienna, ah . . .I said to her – we, we’ve got to take a chance. Either we keep going or let’s stay here or something. So I said, “Just pretend that you’re sick” But she said, “I don’t have to pretend, I can’t . . “ and she kept throwing up and, and throwing up. And she said, “ I am sick” She said, “I didn’t eat, but what am I throwing up for?” And, actually, she threw up a lump of blood.

Q: mmmmmm

A: And so, I, I’m holding her back --- she was a little on the heavy side. And I’m holding her back and, and, ah, and I think that there was a horse and wagon and they went this way. We stayed back and we were hiding behind the horse and wagon here. And we stayed and I thought --- I said to her, “ Now, when they coming for us, it’s alright, it’s just – you are sick, so you had to throw up” And they kept going, and they kept going, and we stayed behind.

Q: And nobody came for you?

A: And nobody came behind. And, and that’s what, ah, and, which is --- then nowhere to go. And then we ended up in Russian hands.

Q: Ohhh.

A: So, the Russian walked us all over again.

Q: How did you get away from the Russians?

A: Ohh - you sure you want to know everything in that?

Q: Yes.

A: Well, Russian locked us up all over again because when you don’t have a place to go, you don’t have a parents --- you, ah, unless you want to go to Siberia --- and I’ll be dammed if I’m gonna go to Siberia – and, ah, I I thought. So, stayed for about six months in that Russian concentration camp. Ah, it was a little freer, ah, I mean not freedom, but a little freer. You had a little more to eat, ah, soup had something in it, not plain water. Bread was rationed, and thicker. And, ah, there was a soldier that, ah, he kinda had an eye on me. He was a a Tartar. So, he had a kinda --- and he called me Erichka (?), which is – Erichka, Ilonka (?), Ilona, Ilona is Erichka - they call Erichka, Erichka. And so he, he said, “Ohhhh, I wish I had a tobacco” And I said, “Well, I know some people outside” I didn’t – “I know some people outside” and I, Ah --- “If you lifted the wire” You know “and shut the switch, I’ll go out and I come back, I’ll bring you lots of tobacco.” So, I heard next day that they shot him.

Q: Because he let you out?

A: He let me out. But I crawled for three days and I – where I ended up, I don’t know where I ended up – in some German town. And, ah, ah, German, ah, I didn’t like German, of course, to, to hide me or something like that but I was hiding and, ah, not eating and, ah, ah, living like a absolute dirty pig – hungry and scared and frightened and, ah --- then I ended up with Russian --- working with Russian. I worked, ah, I spoke Polish, I spoke Russian, I spoke German --- so they needed me for that. But, ah, I stayed with them for a few months, couple months, a few months.

Q: You were doing translations, then, for the Russian army?

A: Yeah. So, then I decided to go up to, ah, ah, Berlin.

Q: You were free now?

A: I am free now. I am free. I decided to go to Berlin and, ah, I though I would --- I ended up in, ah, American sector --- I don’t --- I ended up all over in Russian sector. It’s just --- things didn’t work. So, one time I, ah -- just want to tell you the end --- how I met my husband. And, I met my husband, ah, he was in a, he was a, a he’s a dentist, he’s a ---well he was a captain. And, ah, I was, ah, walking by --- in a black market – trying – I don’t have any money --- what, what was I trying to buy, you know. I just thought maybe somebody would give me something. So, those two officers, Americans standing there, and, and peer around it, and so, he starts speaking to me and, ah, he said “ you Spanish?” Because I , hey – it’s like a little brush coming out, you know – and black--- I have black hair. And so, “are you Spanish?” I said, “No”. and, ah, we start talking and, ah, well, we stopped to café. I was so, ah, -- we sit down and he ordered some cookie and, ah, I fainted. I was so hungry I wanted all those cookies, ah, eat in a hurry. I didn’t care about, ah, any officers or anything. I just wanted that food. I fainted and, ah, any officers or anything. I just wanted that food. I fainted and, ah, he was still there and, ah, ah, ah, -- A week later he took me away from Russian zone and put me to American zone and, and we got married. But it wasn’t so easy to get married because I didn’t have any paper and, ah, American wanted to know whether I’m not German, whether I am not, ah, well whatever, to him. So, ah, we went to Polish consulate, of course. And, who I see in Polish consulate is the big shot – is the one in Regensburg that I brought the food in.

Q: mmmmmm

A: So, he recognized me and he said, “Yeah, she’s --- she was in the concentration camp” And he released paper and we got, we got married. Well, anyway, I did – had a nightmare for a long time. The nightmare quite on me. So the, you know . . . I did get pregnant, ah, couldn’t carry it because the doctors told me I was, there is, ah, miracle because even when the German ruined everything inside me. So, we didn’t ever had a children. So, my nightmare, my nightmares are now back again. That last brought it that I was tell you about in Poland?

Q: Mmmm

A: Ah, that, ah, we are youngest from a first wife? Well, his granddaughter is eighteen and she wanted to come to America. My husband, being such a good hearted, he said, “Oh, lets have her here for three months.” And, ah, well, that girl disappear from here – and went to Venice with some people and she is here illegally. And once I saw her, that reminded me on my brother – how nasty he was – I have a nightmare again and she’s here illegally. And, and that, that brought the whole thing back. And I can see the, myself as a twelve again. So everyone, do you want me to continue with something else? Ask me, I’ll ah . .

Q: No, I think you’ve

Q: I have one more question.

A: Yes.

Q: When you left that Russian camp. You know, when he let you out to get --- supposedly to get cigarettes. Was the war over at this time?

A: yeah.

Q: Oh. So when you got out there, then you were free at that point?

A: yeah. I was, I was free, but not from Russian concentration camp.

Q: No.

A: They would- decided what to do with you – ah, sent to – send you to Siberia, or, or when you sick that they would get rid of you. Or, ah, ah, whatever, ah, he – Russian were not, ah Russian, na na. And then they start calling me for some reason a Jew, a Jew --- and I Jew? And, ah, ah, Moladashkadevka )?) Moladashkadevka. So, I thought to myself--- well, the hell with you – I don’t care what you call me – you know--- so long don’t – Jews don’t touch me, you know.

Q: mmmmmm

A: So, ah ---- but they wouldn’t, they wouldn’t have let you free. I don’t know what, what they would have done.

Q: How did you get back to Germany?

A: Crawled. You walk. Walked. Crawled, ah . . .

Q: And nobody stopped you and you just . .

A: Oh --- you go through the woods. You don’t go through – you, you go, ah, mostly you don’t know where you’re going. But, ah, you kind of, ah, sense it by the sun where the, you know, by the sun or when the star were out. You kind of sense it by the star where is, ah, east and where is, ah north and so on – you can sense it by that. But ah mostly during the day, ah I crawled.

Q: Or you hid?

A: And you want –be careful that nobody sees me. But mostly through the woods, through the, ah, swampy stuff.

Q: Have you ever gone back, Mrs. Stein – to Europe at all?

A: Yeah, we did go, ah, to Poland. Which I am sorry about that. Ah, I didn’t need that.

Q: It was too painful.

A: Because, ah, because I don’t, I don’t really – didn’t have anybody --- and I accepted that.

Q: I’m sorry.

A: Except that brother which . . .