United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Bella Tovey
January 30, 1992
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PREFACE

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BELLA TOVEY
January 30, 1992

Beep.

Can you describe for me the difference in everyday life from before the war, and then after the Germans came. Tell me how things changed.

Well, to begin with, life was disrupted immediately. We, uh, I didn't go to school. I was glad that I didn't have to go to school, I didn't like the school I was going to, that's how stupid I was when the war broke out. But, I grew up very quickly. Uh, my...it's difficult to really say that because the disruption was...gradual, and some things were very drastically different when the war broke out, and then gradually life became more normal, but very different than it was before the war, so that for instance we came back from the country shortly before the war broke out, and our cupboards were bare, and my mom tried to buy food because she had survived the first world war, and she knew that it will be difficult to buy food in the beginning, but she couldn't get any staples, she couldn't get any bread, she couldn't get any flour, she couldn't get any potatoes. So, she bought whatever she could, so we ended up having uh, chocolates, and halva, and caviar, and, and, and pickled uh herring, but no, fun food, but not real food. Uh, the Germans came into our city 3 days after the war broke out. So, then immediately, the 1st thing that happened, there was shooting, you'd hear, we didn't, the first thing that happened is that no one walked out, we didn't leave our apartment. We were afraid to leave. And then, of course, as soon as the Germans came in, they passed all kinds of decrees, and there was a curfew. Uh, later on, some maybe, I don't remember exactly, maybe a week later, people started walking out into the street. People had to go out. We, bakeries were apparently given permission to start baking bread so that people were going and buying bread. I remembers the first time I left the house with my mother very early in the morning. My mother didn't want my father to leave the house. You kept men in the house if you could help it. That was true not just for the Jewish population, it was true for, for all of us. Uh, so I remember getting up very early in the morning and, because there was a curfew, but, perhaps even before the curfew. In other words, it may have been earlier than, than the time when we were permitted to leave because my mom was anxious to get into the bread line. And I remember standing in the bread line, and I remember bringing a bread home, which was a wonderful thing, because we didn't have any real food as I told you for, probably about a week. Uh, well, then I also remember, I remember that about perhaps 10 days after the war broke out, that the Germans and that was a treatment that was apparently meant for the Jewish people. Because I remember that soldiers came into the apartment house in which we lived. Most people in Poland, If they lived in cities or big

towns, did not live in private homes, they lived in apartment houses, and the apartment houses had courtyards, and I remembered soldiers came into the courtyard and started to shout that all the Jewish people have to come down to the courtyard, and I do remember coming down with my mom and my father, and I was the oldest, there were 4 of us. And I think that our cook, who was Jewish, was still with us at that point, and she came down. And we came down, and they took all the men away. They took my father. And I don't remember how long my father was gone. That was , that was a very difficult time for us, but I do remember that my father came back. He may not have been gone more than a week. But I remember that my father was, had auburn hair, and I I remember that when he came back he was almost all grey. And I was shocking. And my father, now that I think about it, he was 39 years old. He was born in 1900, and this was 1939. So he was 39 years old, and he turned grey. And they, I also know that some men didn't come back, because apparently the Germans killed some of the Jewish men, whether it was at random, or whatever the reason, my father never talked about it. So that was, I don't know if I'm describing the difference, but uh, before the war, I, we had a very normal household, we had, I went to school, I was the oldest, we had my, my parents were we were not rich but we were very comfortable. My father owned a children's infant wear factory. We had help in the house. We, we went to school, we went to parks, we, we, I had friends, I read books, I did continue reading during the war. That was the one thing that in the beginning was good. There were lending libraries and we had curfews and I did get an education at the beginning of the war. I was a, I was always a bookworm, and at, in the beginning there wasn't that much to do, so I did a lot of reading. That was perhaps the one nice thing that happened, uh

Can you talk a little bit about how you continued an education after the schools were closed, and how you taught your brother.

My okay my let me just tell you a few things. uh, there was no school. First thing of course, that the Germans did is that Jewish children were not permitted to go to school. All schools were closed to us. But my parents, my parents didn't know what was in store for us. No one did at that point. In fact, my parents felt that things may get better. They felt that some of the horror stories, the, the, the shooting, and that this was just what happens when a country is occupied, and the occupiers want to put the fear of God into the population, so there is harsh treatment. But my parents thought that after a while, uh, and that was their memory of the first world war, that uh life will become a little more normal. Of course, given the fact that there was a war out there and then of course my parents hoped that the war will end, and it will end the right way. So, we so my parents, I don't remember exactly when, but probably maybe a month or two after the war started, we started uh private tutoring. Now, I don't mean that it was a on a one to one basis, but the

teachers who taught in these schools, organized classes and we would meet in different people's houses, and I remember in my group, there were maybe 12 or 13 of us, and we studied, we really had classes. Uh of sorts. We certainly studied Polish and polish literature and history and geography and it was more difficult with sciences because we had no labs, uh we did mathematics, and my parents were very, very concerned that we continue because they felt that once the war will com to an end, that there is going to be a world, and they wanted us to continue with our education. Uh, so I was in such a group, and so were my sisters. My youngest brother was only 6 when the war broke out so I started to tutor him. I taught him to read and write and he was a very good in mathematics.. I think that had he lived he may have been really extraordinary. I have a very bright, very, very good, very bright son who's extremely good in mathematics, as a matter of fact, and I think that it may have been, I don't know, in the genes.

We have to reload.

If you could start just where you tutored your little brother.

My brother was 6 years old, and instead of sending him to some kind of a organized school, not school (cough), but organized tutorial, I eh, I was the one who tutored him, and I taught him how to read and write, and I taught him arithmetic, and he was very bright, he was very good in mathematics. He was a bit of a whiz kid. I remember that, after a while, I used to take him around because uh, particularly in the evening when there was a curfew, uh, in the courtyard, people were sitting in the courtyard, it wa- still before it got very cold, and I remember that my brother, his name was Lulek, uh, would, people would say to him uh, how much is 5 x 75, and he would come back right away, or more than that, he would say, they would say to him how much
is 20 x 183, and it wouldn't take him but a second to give the answer. And as I said, I really think that he was he was uh, uh extraordinary when it came to mathematics. He had some kind of a gift. And he didn't live to realize his potential obviously. So, that was my little brother. Uh, things were becoming normal, but they weren't. The one thing I remember is that how very quickly we were hungry for a piece of bread. There wasn't enough bread in the house. We were, food was rationed. And I remember my brother asking my mom for another slice of bread, and my mom say no, that's all you can get. Sometimes one of us would give him a little piece of our bread because we felt that he was little and he didn't understand, but my didn't encourage it. My mother felt we should all get our, a certain amount of food. But then things did improve some. My father's factory was taken over by the Germans, by German Troihender, that means somebody that the Germans trust. And uh, my father worked in his factory, what it meant is that he taught the other men probably how to run the factory and how what to do. But that was good because he then, we, as a family, he was

getting paid, and we were getting ration cards. Uh, everything was rationed by that time in Poland, so it was very important to have the cards, and if you didn't work, you didn't have the ration cards, and my mother probably started to work at this time to, I don't remember where she worked, but I know she was working. Uh, I also remember, a few things that happened that were traumatic at that point. One was that shortly after the war broke out, uh, may have been a, shortly after my father started working in his factory, when the factory was taken over, there was a knock on our door, in the apartment in which we lived, and my mom opened the door, and there was a German lady. She was a Folksdeutschess??, so she was somebody who became, she was maybe partly Polish, and she had some German uh family in the background, and with 2 SS men or 2 soldiers, I don't remember. And she walked into the apt and she looked around and she said, I like it, all of it. And the following day, some, uh they apparently she was able to get some big trucks and they came, people came into our place, and they took everything out of our apartment, all the furniture, everything that was left, all the rugs. She was a nice lady, she sent us some broken chairs, and a table and beds, and an old wardrobe. I remember that that was, at that point, it seemed like, not a tragedy anymore, but certainly...something that we're upset about. Little did we know that there was much, much worse in store for us. We simply didn't, didn't realize it. In fact, I do remember, but that was later, that during the time when I was reading so much, I read a book. It was called 40 Days of Museldag??? by Franz Werfel, I don't know how to pronounce his name w-e-r-f-e-l. But I think Americans know him because he wrote a book called the Song of Bernadette, I think, which was made into a movie. But in the book, 40 Days of Museldat, he wrote about the, what the Turks did to the Armenians during the 1st world war, and I remember, not right then, not in the beginning of the war, but maybe a year into the war, I remember coming down to my father with that book. And I said, "Daddy, Dad, that's what the Germans are going to do to us." And I was crying. And I do remember that my father looked at me and he said, "Don't say that, how can you say that? The Turks were much less civilized than the Germans. The Germans would never do anything like that. Not the Germans. They may do horrible things, but not what the Turks did to the Armenians. I'm just telling you this because I want you to understand that we really didn't have any idea what was in store for us. I don't know why. My father, at that point, I remember, did listen to there was , we were not allowed to have radios, but my father used to meet in the evening with some friends in the house in which we lived during the curfew, and they listened to BBC. And we knew that friends fell, we knew what was going on at that point. Of course, later on, we no longer, my father, it was too dangerous to listen to, to and maybe there was no radio anymore, but in the beginning, certainly in the 1st half a year of the war, we did know what was going on in the world. It was easier to get, to get, uh, uh and idea of what was going on. We also had, that brings me to a couple of things I was telling you about the furniture that was taken. Some things um didn't happen right away. We lived in what was called an open ghetto. What that meant is that during that period when the

Germans took over our city, they did some shifting around. Some people had to leave their apartments because there were some areas in the city where the Jews were not allowed. Some areas we were allowed to stay in, so what was happening is that people were doubling up, and that meant that many people had to take in other people into their apts. And we actually did get another family to live with us, and they happened to have been actually German Jews from Leipzig, who must have been also sent into our city. And uh, and we could stay in our apt., which meant that our street was part of that open ghetto. Now, an open ghetto was what that meant is that we were not allowed to leave the area. We were not allowed into some streets of the city. We were only allowed in the area which was considered the open ghetto, but the non-Jews, the Poles, could come into our area, and so could maybe, and so certainly did the Germans. Of course, they did anyway. Because of it, there was some barter. There was some, it was easier to, to if, if, if people had something that they can, that they could barter, then they were able to supplement some of their food. And I'm sure that in the beginning that's what happened in my family. Even though the Germans took all the gold away, you know, and they came and they took the silver. People had to give everything away. I'm sure that my parents may have hidden some, maybe my mother hid some of her rings or something because the 1st year of the war, once things started being a little more normal, there was some food that my parents were able to get, probably on the black market. And the fact that it was an open ghetto made life in that sense easier. On the other hand, you couldn't go into many street, and I have many memories of standing uh I do have a memory of for instance at one time and that was also maybe a half a year after the war broke out, uh standing in front of the main street in our city, which was called, became Hitler Strasse, but it was the street of the Third of May, which is when the Poles had a national holiday, and it was a beautiful street with, with many trees.

Beep

So let's go back to the beginning of that memory of that street.

I, I have a memory, I remember my mom, when, when we were, when we started wearing our star of David, and, and when it was, became obvious that we are not allowed into many streets, I had that memory of standing in front of that street, just at the entrance, knowing that I'm not allowed to go there. And I'll never forget how beautiful that street, that whole street seemed to me, with all of those beautiful Chestnut trees. And I remember I would have given everything I had. And I remember that I had such an urge to go into that street, to just disregard the fact that I'm not allowed, and then somebody pulled me back, must have been a friend, and said Don't, no, don't go there. And I went back. Uh, it's just a little thing. My memory of some of the things, I'm, I'm

trying to remember how long we were, I was I was tutored. I think it was till about 1941, perhaps, the winter of 1941 was a cold one. I do remember that at somewhere around this time, I started to work, but I continued with my schooling. But at the end of 1941, things were getting bad, they were getting worse, and I remember, we stopped school. Things were getting worse because it was more difficult to get heat. People started to disappear. But, most of them were young men and women who were taken to labor camp, to work camps in Germany, and there was contact, they were allowed to write postcard a month, so we knew where they were. If some people disappeared, and we didn't hear from them, that was not that well-known, although, that's not true. In the very beginning, a lot of the intelligentsia did disappear, and that was not just the Jewish intelligentsia, that was true for the Poles too, so that some professor, some doctor, some, and, now we know what happened to them. That was, again, considered just the beginning. People always, I remember that my parents felt that in the beginning, the things that happened in the beginning, horrible as they are, are not a, a, a sign of what's going to be, but rather, something that happens when a country is occupied, they kept saying that, and then it's going to be, somehow life will be a little more normal. They were wrong, obviously. Uh, and I now know that there was a psychological war against the Jews that many of the things that were happening to us were gradual. I think that this is very important to remember. I think that if they had, if things had happened to us in a more sudden way, a more immediate, I think there would have been a much stronger reaction in the Jewish communities. This is my own feeling. I may be wrong. I think that when you strip a human being of his dignity slowly, he is not the same person, and I think that in a certain way, what the Germans were doing, by putting us into an open ghetto, by taking away some of our rights slowly, it was a conditioning that permitted us to, it made us, that made us uh., more willing, if I, maybe, more willing, more able to accept it. But, of course, I was a child, but I'm thinking about my father because my father was a really, I think, wonderful human being, and, and, and intelligent. And I and I, and so was my mom. And I wonder why they were so unaware of some things, and I think they were. Maybe they had a belief in the goodness of human nature, and maybe that was their undoing. Because they didn't see, I don't think that they saw what was happening. They didn't realize where it was going. Of course, the fact that we were so cut off, that there was no communication, didn't help. Let me tell you a few things that happened. Let me go back to my life. In 1942, in the Spring of 1942, somebody, a, a militiaman, we had in our open ghetto, we were still in the open ghetto. We had militia people. These were Jewish people who were, kind of a ghetto police, came to our place, and they had a list, and I was on that list, and they were going to take me to a labor camp in Germany. This was very early. This must have been March or February of 1942. And I was not quite 16, I was born in 1926, so I was about 15-1/2, and they took me from the house, and they took me took me to a place that was called like a, it was like a transit camp. In other words, I wasn't taken immediately to Germany, but to this transit camp which was

still in our ghetto. Uh and we were, I was not the only one, there were a lot of young girls and women ranging probably in ages from about 15 or 16 to 25 and men, but separately, and we were waiting, now I realize to be bought by some of the German firms to be taken to Germany. My father was devastated. I think I was his favorite. I don't think parents should have favorites, but I was his favorite daughter, and he was devastated, and he tried to get me out. This is again, ironic, because Auschwitz was already operating, and going to Germany was probably not a bad thing at that point because it meant going to a labor camp. But my father didn't know about Auschwitz, and he didn't want his 15 year old child to go to a labor camp. So he turned heaven and earth, and apparently this was possible, and he made an arrangement with a girl, who was about 18, and maybe that's what permitted him to do it, because it was another child actually going for me. He paid for it. She probably was poorer than we were--as poor as we were, my parents may still have had something that they could pay these people. And she agreed to go for me, and maybe the fact, my father thought that since she's 18, she's at least a young adult, and he was paying for it, and she was supposed to be my substitute if you will. I didn't know anything about it except that when I would come to the window at the transit camp, and my father would be passing by, he motioned to me that he was doing something. And uh, about I don't know, about 4 or 5 days, a week after I was taken, I was still in that transit camp, my name was called, and I was told to take my belongings, I had with me some clothing that I was permitted to take. I took it with me, and I was told to go out, and as I was coming out, I noticed my younger sister, my sister was 2-1/2 yrs younger so she was 13 yrs old. And I noticed her and I was in, I was tired, and, and, and in a state of shock, but as I went, as I walked out, and I saw my parents were waiting not right near the place, but where they were permitted to wait, and I, and I saw them, they were both standing and crying I think, and I started to cry and I said, Why am I, Why am I out, and why is, what is Pina doing there? What is she doing there? And they started, they embraced me, and they took me home, and they told me that what happened actually is that that morning when my substitute was supposed to show up and go in for me, she changed her mind, and my parents were desperate. And my sister, who was always a very, a kind of a tomboy, one of those kids that was never afraid of anything said, "I'll go for Bella", and my parents thought she's nuts, she's crazy, but uh, I don't know, I don't know what happened, they must have been very distraught. She convinced them that she's going to go in for me, this was her idea, and that once she's in there, she's going to tell them that she doesn't belong there, she's only 13 years old, and they're going to send her home. I don't know how she could convince my parents, but this is a true story, she convinced them, and she went in for me. And lo and behold, she was sent to a labor camp, to Sudetenlat, which is in Czechoslovakia, and uh...

Um. So my sister went to the camp. And it was horrible. I felt so guilty, my parents were very upset, she was a child. She wrote a postcard about a month after she was taken, and she said that

she's fine, not to worry about her, and uh, one of the most amazing things that happened, I still to this day, I don't know how it happened, she came back to our ghetto three months after she was taken. And when she came home, she told us that as soon as she got to the camp, she told everybody that she didn't belong there, she was 13 years old. I don't know how she convinced them to send her back to the ghetto. Auschwitz was operating. I know because I was later in camps myself. If you got sick in a camp, you were sent to Auschwitz. It would have been the logical to for the Germans to send her to Auschwitz. Maybe that's the German bureaucracy, I don't know. She came back to our ghetto. We had a, a, a Jewish uh community council if you will, or whatever you call it, a Jewish govt. The head of the government, I was notified that she was coming back, and lo and behold, she came back. this must have been may or June, I remember the summer of 42 because it was a difficult summer because, but it was such a joy, of course, to have her home, and all the people in the ghetto, she became a bit of a, she was so well known, because it was an amazing thing. And, in August of that year, in the meantime, things were getting really, things were getting bad. Uh, people were again being taken to camps, but what happened in August, and now I understand that, uh, we were, there was, there were orders post, orders posted all over the ghetto that on a given day, and it was in August, I don't remember when, I remember it was a very hot day. We were all told, all the Jewish people in the ghetto were supposed to come to a big stadium. There was a big, must have been like a field where sports would be, oh they would have some sport activities, but it was a big place, and we were all told to come. And of course, the signs were very specific. Anybody not showing up would be killed instantly. I don't know whether some people didn't go, whether some people went into hiding. I know that my parents talked about it, and decided that we have to go. And I remember that we were told to dress well. And I remember we were walking in the street, through the city towards the stadium. All the people, all the Jewish people in the ghetto. And I do remember (coughing), I remember Poles, Poles were standing on the sidewalks, and uh, I don't hate all the Poles, I always, I make sure that I say that, because there were some decent people among them. But, unfortunately the majority were not decent. They were very antisemitic. And there we were, walking in the middle of the street, like cattle. And they were standing on the sidewalks, and they were jeering, and they were calling us dirty names. There were some that were standing and they were crying. I remember that too. It makes me feel good always. And we went to this big place, and I remember it was hot, and it was a long day, there was no water and no food. Not that you can't stand it for a day, but, I remember my brother was still a child, he was crying. Uh, and I don't remember how long, it was such a long day, and it was about 2 o clock or 3 o clock in the morning when we finally came to what must have been some kind of a table with some people, officials standing, where they were looking at our IDs. And, uh, my father was working, so was my mother, so was I. We were all, at this point, I was working, and my mother was working and my father was working. But, apparently, his work was

considered important enough, but he was told to go to one side, and the five of us were told to go to another side. And after that, we didn't see our father. And, towards the morning, we were again, those of us who were sent to the other side, were marched down again the street towards two big, apparently, in the meantime, they had emptied 2 big apartment houses, and that became apparently a transit camp, and we were all shoved into this camp, this apartment house. I now know that this was the 1st big evacuation--a euphemism, of course, for a transport to Auschwitz. I didn't know it then, we didn't know. But, we sensed that it was something terrible because the treatment of the people was ugly. The soldiers were pushing us and beating and I remember one thing that I'll never forget--there was a woman holding a little baby, child, I don't know, maybe it was year old, I don't remember, and the child was crying, and the soldier took the child and, and, took the child out of the mother's hands, and hit the child against the wall, and I still the, the, the, the blood, the, the, probably the brain, I don't know, it it just, it did, the whole skull kind of exploded. And the woman was shrieking, and he, and he was beating her. And my mother pulled us away, she didn't want us to look at it. And I was crying. And we were all very, very upset. We knew that something, something horrible was happening. That, during that, that was during the day because we had come in early in the morning from, from that stadium. So during the day, I don't know how my mother was able to do it. How she, how her, how, how her mind was working, but she was probably trying to do something (cough), and she convinced my brother, who was a cute looking kid, he had dark blond hair, and big green eyes, and I suppose the Germans would say that he didn't look very Jewish. And so she told him, and he spoke a good German, and a good Polish. So she told him to go over to the guard, who was standing at the gate, at the entrance to the apt house, and pretend that he's all alone here, and that his father, that he wants to go to his father. And I remember that she kind of told him what to say. And I, he went, and I kind of followed him, but I was standing away. I didn't hear him, but I could see him. And then I, so he must have told him that he wants to go home, that his father is home, and I remember that that German soldier looked at him, looked down at him, maybe he was nice human being, maybe he believed him, maybe he took pity on the kid, but he opened the gate, and he said, "Run! Run home!" and my brother ran, ran out. And that evening, at night, must have been late at night, a militiaman came, and took my sister, he just came in, found us, and he said, uh, he just came in and he said that , he said to my mom, that she's such a brave kid. Let me take her home to your husband. And he just took her. In the meantime, my father must have been doing something, trying to get us out, and he managed. This was the one time he managed to do it. And, uh, we were, it wasn't that night, it must have been a night later, a day later, because I remember being there another day. It was, it was a difficult time, but at night, somebody came, somebody must have risked his life for, for money or for whatever, for whatever my father must have given him whatever he had. And , they took us, and it was very, it was nothing heroic for us, it was just tricky. We went upstairs to the roof, and through the attic, no we

went up through the chimney on the roof, and then, that house was connected to another house where there was a bakery. And the houses were connected, so you didn't have to be an acrobat and or jump. All you had to do was just quietly get up, the chimney on the roof, into the other chimney, and then down to the bakery. I do remember coming down, and we were all covered with flour from the dust. And I, I think it was at night, and they kept us, because there was a curfew, they kept us till the next morning, and that morning, they dusted us up.

We've got to-----

Beep

Uh, I do remember that my mom sent my younger sister first, and then I went...home. You had to make sure that you are not conspicuous. We probably looked a little bit ragged. And then my mom came home, and, funny, we were already covered with lice. The place was already dirty. We washed. But it was so good, because we were still together, a family, six of us. But, by that time there were rumors in the ghetto, and things were getting really bad. Uh, something happened--I want to tell you about my father because I, I always remember that my father, I loved my father very much. My father was really a, a decent human being. The man who was the head of the ghetto had worked for my father before the war for a short time, and he was very fond of my father. My father didn't have any dealings with him during the whole time, very little. And if he did, I didn't know about it. But, this particular time, apparently, the head of the ghetto, his name was Monyet(ph), would be Moshet(ph) maybe today. Or Moses, Merin. M-E-R-I-N. I'm sure there's some...there's, there's some, some uh documents on him. He was, he was the head of our ghetto, and then I think he was killed by the SS men in Catovitza in '43. Anyway, he did , he, he, he had a lot of contact with the SS men. He probably knew about many things that were happening. And he, he either met my father or called him in, and offered him a job of a militiaman. And uh, my father was a traditional Jew, a believing man, and, my father looked at him and he said to him, he said to him, he said to him, how can ask me to take that kind of a, that kind of a job. And Monyet said to him, Look Erin, you have a family. If you work as a militiaman, you can keep your family a little longer in the ghetto. And there is a war going on. And the war may end in a month, in three months, and the longer you can keep your family together, the better your chances for staying together as a family for surviving. I don't know what Monyet knew, what this Merin, knew, but he knew probably more than many people, and as I said, there were already by that time many rumors. So, my, my and my father said to him, But I, I, I couldn't do that. I could not, I would not do that, I wouldn't go to other people's houses, and take people for a transport to work or whatever, and uh, he, the guy got very impatient with my father, and he said Look, he said, I'm trying to help you!

I'm, I'm trying to help you. And, anyway, look, it's your God. My father said to him, Look, I'm, I'm, I'm a believing man. It's against my principles, against everything I believe in. And he said, but it's your God who is doing it. Who is looking down at all our misery, and he's not lifting a finger. And my father said to him, I don't know who's doing it, but even if it's God, I'm not going to be his, he used the Hebrew word, malahamavet. I'm not going to be his angel of death. And I know about it because my father came home and he told us. He felt he wanted us to know that he had this chance, and he didn't take it, and he wanted us to understand why. And, uh, he didn't do it. And, uh, and I, I think he was right, of course. And uh, and uh, things got bad. After that, we were sent to a closed ghetto. That was in the end of 1942, we were told to move--people had to leave their place of wherever they were living, there was a special area assigned for the ghetto. It was called Shrodoula, it was a little village next to our city. And I remember that we were able to take all our belongings on one cart, I don't remember how we got there, whether it was a horse and a buggy, or a, but we took all of our things, by that time there wasn't much to take, and we were put into this ghetto, and we were given a hut that had one room. I don't think my sister was there already. I think my sister was taken just shortly before that, again to a labor camp. Today I'm grateful because I think that that's why she's alive. I lost my other sister and my brother, but my sister, Pina, was taken at the end of 42, and to a, to another labor camp in Germany. And in 1943, very early, must have been January or February, January probably, I too was taken to a labor camp. And of course by that time, nobody was trying to stop it. We knew that my father must have understood that it's not a, not, that it's okay, it's better this way. And I was sent to this labor camp in Greben near Striegal in Germany, which was in lower or middle Silesia--I come from upper Silesia--that's how the Germans called it. We, by the way, became part of the German Reich immediately. Meaning, the area where I lived. And, I, I remember one thing as we were going to the camp, which I thought was interesting because we were still dressed in our clothing, and we still looked pretty okay, and we were picked for looks and, and, and healthy teeth.

So, as we, and, among us there were some really very pretty girls, really, and as we were walking down the street in that little town of Striegel towards the camp. I remember the Germans were standing on the sidewalks, and they were, I don't whether they never saw any, this was a small town, they, maybe they didn't know any Jewish people, but they kept saying. These are Jewish girls? These are Jewish women? They're so pretty. They look so nice. I don't know what they expected. Maybe they thought we had horns. But they were so sureprised to see us look like normal people. Uh, Greben was a labor camp, so it wasn't terrible. It wasn't terrific, but it wasn't terrible. I worked in a flax factory 12 hours a day, one week on a night shift, one week on a day shift. The work was hard because we did the work that men, German men did, and, before they were taken to the front. We didn't get much food. For those who don't know what a labor camp is, I'd like to describe a little bit how how we lived. We lived in a barrack. Uh, there were bunks in

the barracks. I, uh, the bunks were small narrow beds. There was a straw mattress, a blanket. We had showers. Not always was the water warm, often it was cold, but we washed because we knew that we need to keep clean. We were given a loaf of bread, a pound of bread probably, a week. Which, those of us who had a lot of self-discipline cut into seven pieces, and had a slice a day. Uh, most of us, actually, didn't last for seven days. The more disciplined ones ate it up in five days. Those who didn't have any discipline ate it, probably in two days. I usually lasted about 5 days. I wasn't so big, maybe it was easier. We were given a soup a day. In the beginning, the soups were not too watery. There were some colorabi, some vegetables, sometimes piece of potato in it. Once a week we were given a little jam, a little, uh, a little margarine. Once in a while in the beginning, we even got a small piece of horsemeat, or some, some, some beef or something. Later on, of course, we didn't. And black, uh, ersatz coffee, which is like a substitute coffee. We were always hungry, of course. I remember some girls literally crying themselves to sleep. Uh,...

We have to reload.

CR-Six

beep

I was working in a flax factory, as I started to tell you before, and, uh, I worked in the, the first, it's hard--I don't know what they call them, it was a fully automated factory where the flax came in on big... by train, they, uh, in other words by uh, uh, what is it, like wagons, uh, uh, what do you call the train, it's not a train where people, not passenger trains but...

Freight.

What?

Freight trains.

Crate trains! And we would have to unload the flax from the, into the first department if you will that had big cones like, they had machines that looked like cones because the flax had little um, mmmm...there were seeds in little balls in, in on, on the flax, and they were trying to save the seeds, because the seed was what they used to make oil, uh, for cooking or whatever. So, it was very important to unload the, our job, our task was to unload the, the flax, and then, send it through these big machines that were combing off the, the, the seed, and then it would go to a next dept where it was

cooked. The final, the, the, the last, eh, eh, department in that factory already produced uh, uh thread that was put on spools. This is how it was done, and it was a fully automated factory, and what that meant is that they only needed to work us, to work the people who worked in that first dept which was called riefenlage(ph), I don't know what that means, in, in English, uh, enlage must be department and rief must have been the, the, the name of that first place, and as long as they rushed us, the whole factory was working, so the SS men were forever standing over our heads making us work, so, because if we worked fast, they did. And, uh, we, this is, this is, and did both, sometimes I unloaded trains, sometimes I was at the machine. Uh, in the, in the evening, at night, the night shifts were the hardest because it was very cold. The place was open, it was winter, we were not well dressed, and it was really a, a, uh, uh, it was a, it was a miserable place, it was, it was hard. But, there were some things; we had a Kapo, we had a girl who was in charge of us, and she was not like some of the Kapos that you read about, she was really a very nice person. She was older than we were, she was about 23 at that point--very beautiful girl, and she was always walking around trying to help everybody. Uh, in the evening around 12 o clock, we used to get a break, when they would bring the soup from the barracks, because that's when we got our soup when we worked. And she would ladle out the soup to everybody, and we would huddle around her, would sit around her, and sometimes we would sit around and talk, and sometimes we would be quiet, and sometimes, when it moved her, Salka, her name was Salka Abramchik(ph), would sing. She had studied voice in Italy, in Milano, I think, and she had a very beautiful soprano, and I remember that night, that particular night that something happened, that she started to sing to us, and she was singing Shubert's serenade, and it was just so beautiful, she had a really beautiful voice, and I remember that it was such a good feeling to be sitting there, it felt so warm. For the few minutes, I forgot where I am; I felt, I thought I was somewhere where it's beautiful and where the sun is shining, and, uh, suddenly, it, I, I, I noticed that we were not alone. And I remember I turned my head very slightly because I was afraid, scared, and I saw this SS man standing, and he was looking at her, at, at Salka, and she, she wasn't aware of it at that point, and I could see that he was really enchanted, he was looking at her with really, with rapture, almost. And suddenly, she must have noticed that he's looking at her, and she stopped singing, and it got very quiet, and he, suddenly started walking towards her, and he pushed, we were sitting down on the ground, so he was kind of pushing us aside, and he walked over to her and he, she was sitting too, and he picked her up, and he started beating her, he started hitting her on the face, he was hitting her, and screaming at her, and he was beating on her really, and screaming so loudly, saying, You have no right! You have no right to sing like this! You have no right to look like this, you dirty Jew!...and then he walked away. Uh, with all of that, I was , I was just thinking that I was, there was still a child in me. I was 16. We were allowed a postcard a month, so I wrote to my parents once a month, and I think I received a postcard a month, and we were allowed to get a little package from home. I don't remember what my parent’s sent me, maybe they send me something, some food or something, whatever they could. I remember getting one or two

packages, but I do remember that, because I was working with this flax, and I was wearing my coat, at that point we were not given any of the prisoners uniforms, we were wearing our own clothing. And it was tearing at my coat, and tearing at my clothing, so I wrote to my mother, and I'm thinking today, How could I do it? But, I wrote to my mother, and I asked her to send me, if she could, a pair of overalls. And, I suppose only a mother does that, I don't know how she did it, but I received, the last package that came from home, I received a blue pair of overalls, and it was obvious, because, I, she may have written me, but it was obvious that she, she, no I know now, I have a cousin who was with, with them, and she survived Auschwitz, and she told me how my mom did it. She took a sheet, an old sheet, a linen sheet, I don't know where she got a, some dye, in, in a kind of a royal blue. She dyed the sheet, and she made me a pair of overalls, and she sent it to me. It was her last gift for me, that she sent me, those overalls....And, after that, there was no mail, and we knew something was happening, we knew that something, something happened. There was no communication. Most of the girls in the camp were from the same area, and communication stopped, so we knew that something had happened to the ghetto, and about a couple of months later, must have been around Yom Kippur, a transport of women came to our camp from Auschwitz. I don't know how many, maybe 50, maybe 100, and among them were some, at least there was one or two that I knew, may have lived on our street, and I remember we were so anxious to find out what happened, and I remember walking over to one of them when we could, and I said, What happened, what happened to, to the ghetto? What happened to my parents? Do you know what happened? And they were so hardened, they had gone through Auschwitz, and she, I remember she said to me, "You mean you don't know?! You mean you don't know what happened? They were all cremated. They were all killed. They went to gas chambers. You mean you don't know about Auschwitz, you don't know what there doing to us? It was really Yom Kippur....(cries). I'm sorry.

Let's stop for a minute----------

beep

Okay, sometimes during this time, our camp was changed from what they called a labor camp to a concentration camp. We became part of the Gross Rosen, which was a big concentration camp, and we were part of that complex, and what that meant is that uh, rules were even stricter. I do remember, for instance, that when we came home from, home to the barracks, from our, from the factory that they had taken all our possessions, all our pictures, some of us had photographs from home. Everything was taken away, they had burned it and taken everything away, so it was, things were getting really...rough in the camp. Uh, it was at that time that something happened that was, I thought, when I think about it today, just remarkable. Um, the last department of that factory was

the one where they were already making the thread, putting it on spools, had big combines, big, big uh, uh, machines, that had uh, belts, uh, the belts were heavy belts, and they were apparently part of that uh, uh, those combines that were, that they were uh using for for making the thread, or putting the thread on the spools, and there were women working around there. Uh, this was on a night shift, and apparently one of those belts snapped, and hit one of the girls, who was working there. Her name was Rose, I don't remember her second name now, and she lost her eye immediately. It, it, apparently it must have hit her on the eye, in the eye, and it swam out, or whatever. And, uh, we heard about it immediately. There was some, there was some communication between, between us. Apparently there was some, some women older than than uh, and a little bit, perhaps, more aware, and uh, they were communicating somehow from one place to the other, in spite of the fact that we were always guarded and watched, and we made a decision. A decision was made that when we get back to the barrack, that we're going to ask for medical help for this Rose, for this girl. Uh, we had a, uh, uh, a little, uh, what they call krankenstuper, which was like a little sick room, like a room where, somebody was sick, you could go to the nurse, who wasn't really a nurse, but she knew a little bit about nursing, and maybe she could do something for you. There wasn't much help. If anybody got really sick, they were sent out of the camp. Uh, but we, so we knew that she is not going to be able to help her. So we decided that we're going to ask for help. I happened in the factory, and we felt that we're going to ask for it. I don't know why we decided to do it, but it was, it was a brave act, and maybe stupid, but, we, we decided. And, when we came back to the barrack, and we were standing on appel, which is when they take, when they count us, and when our commander ------- the women, the woman who is in charge, after she counted all of us, told us to go to the barracks, we didn't move. She was shocked. And she repeated her order, and we didn't move. And then one or two, I don't know who stepped out, and told her that we are not going to go the barracks until Rose is taken--she had been brought into the barrack from the factory, and was in that sick room, but we wanted her to be taken to a doctor. Somebody has to take a look at her, she was hurt in the factory. And, she thought it was ridiculous, funny. Well, anyway, she and her helpers, they started to, to, to beat on us. They were screaming that we have to go back to the barracks, and we weren't moving, and some of us were beaten up pretty badly. Uh, uh, it depended where you were and where the, the whips fell. And, uh, after a while, I must have been one of those who was, who was beaten up, I was, because I don't remember much that happened. But, when I came to, and when I regained my consciousness, I was told that what happened is that the people from the factory, the foreman, and some of the, when they heard that we are standing in the camp, and we're not going to our barracks, they became concerned that we won't be able to come back for the night shift, or maybe there was some conscience, but they came in, and there was some negotiation with the SS men, who were in charge of our camp, and lo and behold, they made arrangements for Rose to go and see a doctor. And I know that she went to town, to, to Streigel,

about a half a dozen of times with the nurse, and with an, with an SS man, or SS woman, and she was treated, she must have had an infection, and they put in a glass eye. She survived, I know about that, and she is in Israel. I don't know if she's still alive, but she was in Israel. And it was one of those amazing things. I, again, it's one of those, they could have, they could have killed us, they could have shipped us off to Auschwitz, and brought in other people to work. Uh, but anyway, we did it. We saved, there's no question that she would have not been alive if we hadn't done what we did, and uh, I don't know if I want to call it resistance, but it was. It was a form of resistance that worked at that time, for her, and for us.....Do you want me to go on?

Yes.

Greben was a labor camp, and as rough as things were, I didn't again, I, now, now I know that it was nowhere nearly as bad as some of the other camps. I was to find this out later on. In 1944, around October, apparently the Russians were coming close to the German border, and orders must have gone out to many camps, to evacuate the camps. And, our camp did get such an order, and sometimes I think early in late October, early November, we were shipped, we were sent on the famous Death March. Death March got its name from the fact that many people didn't make it through the march. We started out by walking. It was already winter in Germany, it was cold. We were marched, I don't remember how many days, uh, we would stop for the night in different places, in barns, to sleep. Sometimes they gave us food, sometimes they didn't. I don't know whether they, they knew themselves where they were marching us. They marched towards one camp--the camps were too full--then they would turn back. Then we were put on cattle trains. As bad as the death march was, the cattle trains were worse. We were crowded into them like, like animals. You couldn't, you, you, you could barely stand...they didn't give us any food. When there was bombing we would be told to run out of the trains. Many of us didn't bother. Germany was bombed, then there was a lot of, there were a lot of activity. And, frankly, for us, we would often look up and, and, and pray that they drop a bomb, maybe, on the Germans, on, didn't matter to us. Uh, some people jumped the trains, tried to escape (cough). Some of them were caught and killed, some probably managed to get away. I tried to jump a few times, but, I didn't manage. And after a, I don't know how long it took, we came to Bergen-Belsen. Bergen-Belsen was , was not a, was not like Auschwitz, it didn't have crematoria. It didn't have, crema--it did have crematoria, I'm sorry, but it didn't have gas chambers. Uh, they didn't need any. It was a real death camp. They had lice and hunger and typhus and typhoid, and people were dying in that camp like flies. When I think, myself, and I sometimes wonder, and, I came to Bergen-Belsen probably early December of 1944, or maybe middle December, and I was liberated in the middle of April. When I think that I survived Bergen-Belsen without, with very little help, I, I, I don't understand how I did it. I just--

this, to me, is one of the biggest puzzlements because it was really a horrible camp.

We have to------

okay.

beep

beep

We were put into a barrack. It was a big barn, like a big place, there was nothing on the floor except some straw. And we were put in there, we were crowded into that place, that we couldn't stretch our legs. We were sitting with our knees close to our chins. It was cold, and it was crowded, but it didn't stay crowded very long. People were dying almost immediately. I remember (cough) that it didn't take long before we could stretch our legs because the girls, the women were dying all around me, and we would carry them out. There were big, big piles of dead bodies outside of the barracks, and (cough) I, I carried many too. I don't know what, how I kept going, but I do remember, was maybe a form of maybe it was some kind of way of protecting myself, that I never, never looked at the faces. I just never looked at the faces. And uh, it was, it was rough. We didn't get food. We didn't get, we get, we would. They would come in once in a while and, and bring some food, but you, it wasn't anything that you could count on. Uh, you couldn't wash yourself--there was no water. I tried in the beginning. I was always covered with lice. I would get up in the morning, and I would shake out my, my uniform, my, funny it had, the uniforms were grey and blue. In the morning you couldn't see the blue on the, on the uniform because I was so, it, I was so covered with lice. Shortly after we got there, though, maybe a week after we got to this barrack, a woman came in. She belonged to the management of the camp. She was working, she had gone through Auschwitz, she was Jewish, she was dressed, she didn't live in a barrack such as we did. She probably had a bunk, and was getting food a little more regularly, and she started calling, asking for somebody by the name of Tila Ringler. My camp sister's name was Freda Ringler. Freda and I were like sisters. She was Czech. We became friendly in Greben--the first camp, and we shared everything. When Freda got an extra bowl of soup for some extra work, she would save me a half of it, even if I wasn't around. When she got an extra piece of bread she would leave me some. When I had an extra soup, I remember I would always make a line on that bowl to mark off which is hers, and I remember eating that soup, and eating it so slowly, and I would eat, and I would come so close to what was Freda's part, for sure, I'm sure, never, never giving her an extra spoon, but never taking a spoon of hers. I never cheated on Freda, and I don't think she ever

cheated on me. And, this, this woman who came there was calling Freda's sister. Freda had an older sister whose name was Tila, and she belonged to a Zionist organization before the war, and when the war broke out, she signed up--apparently the Germans were signing people up to go to Palestine--it was a hoa, hoax. She ended up in Auschwitz. Freda never, Freda knew that Tila disappeared, but she didn't know where she disappeared to. And when she heard this woman calling Tila Ringler, she stepped out and she said, Tila was my sister. What do you know about her? And this, this woman took a look at Freda, and Freda really did look like Tila--they had the same blue eyes, the same face, I know it because I met Tila after the war. But Tila had dark hair, and Freda had blond hair. And that was the only difference, so this woman, uh, took a look at Freda, and she said, of course, I believe you, you are, you look like Tila. And she said, "Tila saved my life in Auschwitz, so I am going to take you out of here because if you stay here, you will die." And Freda said to her, "But you have to take Bella because we are like sisters, and I won't go without Bella." And this woman said to her, "I'm not taking Bella. She's, she's nobody to me, I, I don't care about Bella. I'm taking you because I owe Tila. My life, so I'll, I'll do it for you, but uh, if you don't want to go without Bella, then you can stay here too." And I said, so, I said to Freda, "Freda, that's, that's stupid. If you stay here with me, we'll both die. If you can save yourself, go ahead. And besides," I said, "maybe you could help me." I think that's what made Freda leave--when I said to here that you could help me. And she left, and she became a runner in the part of the camp that was a working camp. There was a hospital there, and she was a runner in that hospital, and that made her life a little easier because she had a bunk, and maybe uh, a little more food. And, she did try to come, she did come, it wasn't easy because they were not allowed to come into our part of the camp, but she would come and she would bring me a potato, or some bread. She would help when she could. I was by that time already what they call in the camps, a musselman, which means that I looked like a walking skeleton. I was dead. I was really skin and bones. And, that was a dangerous way to look, because that meant that you are going. And uh, but something happened to save me, and that was that Freda managed somehow to get me out of that barrack. It was already I think, early March, that she got me out of that barrack into a other barrack into another part of the camp where I went to work, which meant that I got a bunk, and I shared the bunk with another person, and I want to tell you a little bit about that because I did something then that I have on my conscience, and I, I told you about my father, and I told you how I didn't cheat on Freda, and I'm proud of it, but there are some things that I did that I'm not so proud of. Uh, I had a friend in Greben. Her name was Hella. She was not as close to me as Freda, but she was a friend. Hella--Helena in English. Was a very lovely, lovely, gentle, sweet, sweet girl, really, and I was very fond of her. And she was with me in that horrible barrack, and then when I came over to this other barrack, and I had my bunk, maybe a week or two weeks later, she came to see me, and to ask, actually I had gone through, in the meantime, I had had typhus. I don't know how I survived it,

and I had typhoid. Typhus is your stomach illness, I think, and Typhoid was high fever, that attacks, I think, the brain. And I had had both, and I survived it, but I was scared. And Helen came, Hella came, and she was feverish, and she looked sick, and I knew she was sick. And she came over, and she said to me, "Bella, would you let me sleep with you on your bunk tonight? It must have been an evening, my, the girls I shared the bunk with must have been working the night shift, so that I had room. So, she came and asked me whether I would let her sleep with me on my bunk. And I looked at Hella, and I, I saw she was sick, and I was scared, because I had been sick before, and I knew that I could catch it again, I, I, I was afraid. And I said, I said to Hella, "Hella, I'm sorry, but you are very sick, and I have to go to work tomorrow, and I'm afraid I'm going to get sick. And I, I can't let you sleep on my bunk." And she looked at me, she was really lovely. And she said, "It's okay Bella. I understand." She said, "I, I understand." and she walked away. And she died that night. I know because I found out, and, I don't know, maybe she know, maybe she knew she was dying. I never forgave myself that I, I didn't let her, maybe she wanted to die with a little dignity on a bunk, and I didn't, I didn't let her, and I feel very bad to this day whenever I think about it. I don't think I'll ever forgive myself. I think she forgave me. She was that kind of a person.

We can stop now.

Okay, that's good.

Beep

What kind of choices do you think you had in that life that might have helped you survive or helped others survive?

I don't know that I had choices. I'm trying to think. Uh, I honestly think that I survived by luck--I think I was lucky. I must have been somewhat optimistic, I think, maybe. Uh, I think that the fact that I protected myself sometimes, may have been helpful. But I, I must say that I, my life, at least, as I see it, did not give me any opportunities for choices. I tried not to hurt anybody while I was there. I don't remem--I know that there were things going on--not everybody--I had a--we had a Kapo in this Bergen-Belsen, where I worked this last time, who was a real bitch. Uh, I didn't have an opportunity maybe, to do that, but I don't think I would have. I never stole anything from anybody, no matter how hungry or, or, or, or, or, or hungry, no matter how desperate I was. I did not, I did not...do certain things. I think I had a very, I think I was very, I must have had good upbringing, but I don't know that this necessarily helped me survive.

What kind of spiritual resistance did you see or witness?

Well, in the beginning, I probably believed in God, as my father did. I think that I lost that after the Auschwitz people came in. But I think that I, as I said I think that I, I remember that my father said to me that last Yom Kippur at home during the holidays, that he said, at one point, "Maybe won't all of us won't survive, but I hope that you will." I remember he said, and there be somebody left. I don't know whether that gave me some, some feeling that somebody should be left from our feeling. I don't know whether that gave me the strength. Uh, I think that perhaps the fact that I had Freda was very helpful, because we had each other, and she did for me, and I, I did everything I could for her, and she did everything could for me, and maybe that gave us strength. We, we got along, better than some sisters did in the camp. That doesn't mean that there weren't sisters who got along, who, who didn't stay close, but we really supported each other. I think that may have been helpful. Uh, I can't think of anything else really.

Did people pray, did they..

Some did. I think Freda always did. Freda was much, Freda was more of a believer than I. I think I, I had a difficult period for a while there, but she, she was more, I think, uh, steadfast in her belief, I think.

Can you tell about the, when you worked sorting the candies...

Right, right. Uh, that last job of mine, I worked. Believe it or not, the Germans were losing the war, and they were still in Bergen-Belsen, we were still sorting clothing. They had a big, they were taking inventory, and the work that I did, which permitted me to have that bunk, and and some, some, maybe a little more food, was precisely that kind of work. So, what I, but the way I could help myself, because there wasn't really that much to eat, was that I would, I had a right to wear a pair of panties maybe and a slip, uh, or, or a sweater, and maybe a skirt under my uniform. And stockings. Now, if I went to work in the morning, and I didn't put on a pair of panties, or I didn't put on something under my uniform, and then during work, if I could slip it on, and put it on, then I would bring it back to the barrack, and I could barter it, sell it to somebody for something. But, the Kapo was a real, she really was a very, she was Jewish, but she was a bitch, as I said. She didn't, she didn't permit it, but she didn't like me much either. She, I, she was, I think she was dumb, she wasn't very, I don't know that she, I don't think she knew how to read. She was, she was an illiterate. Maybe I was too bright for her, my Polish was too good. I don't know. But she, she, she

really, she picked on me. I also looked like a musselman. That may have been against me. In other words, I was, I was, I looked like a walking, I was a walking skeleton. And so she would, she would check me, and if she saw that I didn't have a pair of panties on, I couldn't bring a pair of panties home, she would, she would, she'd beat me up. So, it wasn't a tremendously successful thing for me, and besides which, I didn't work there very long because I got sick again, and I came down with Para-typhoid, and this was the last, these were the last weeks of the camp, and, if anybody ever tells you that you cannot survive without food for a long time, I don't think that we were given any food in that camp towards the end of the, the, the occupation. The last 10 days, people like I--I'm not saying there were some people who were still able to get around--I didn't get any food for close to 10 days, I rarely had water. That's why I don't understand how I survived. But I made it without food for all this time. Freda did come when she could when she could, when I so sick, and she brought me water, and she was with me that last night before the liberation. She brought some water, and I think she may have brought me an aspirin or something. I had a very high fever, and that following day, the British came, and we were liberated.

Can you talk about, do you remember older people being in the camps, like your parents' age. Did you know any of them or were there very few of them?

There were not many older people in Bergen-Belsen. There were certainly not many, there were not, there was one girl who I am still friendly with, who came to Greben to our working, to the labor camp, from Auschwitz, and she was from my husband's city, from Wootsh(ph), and uh, her name is actually, uh, she's alive, the girl is alive. Her name is Lucia Carroll, and she came with her mother to our camp, and this was a novelty--there was a girl who came to camp with her mother. Now, she buried her mother in Bergen-Belsen, but her mother was with her in Greben. This was the only woman that I remember who was my mother's age, and my mother was 43 when she died, when she was killed. So this may have been, maybe in her early 40s, and that was old. For, in other words, in our camp, that was, she was the only one that age, and I don't remember many in Bergen-Belsen. Now there were some Russian women in our camp, and some of them may have been older, but again, not that much older.

So, in general, who lived, and who didn't live?

Well, that's hard to tell. There were, you know, after the war, I suppose there are some statistics. there are some people who survived. I had, I had one cousin who survived with his 2 sons, and he must have been in his 40s, but that was rare. I think the, the very young didn't make it, and , not just the very old, but people, often, perhaps, mothers, didn't make it because, now, my mother was

a very pretty woman, and she probably looked quite young, but she went, I'm sure that she didn't want to be separated from her two, from my sister and my brother who were children. So often women who were older, older, meaning who had children--if they were in their late 30s or even if they were in their early 30s, if they had children, they went with their children. And, and, if they were older, they didn't have a chance.

Beep.

I just want to go back and finish that thought about who had a chance to live and who didn't from an age standpoint.

Well, then, my feeling is that, only people who are able to, to go to work, and even then, it depended very much on what the demand was. Uh, in Auschwitz, there were times when they sent the whole transport into the ovens. Without any, any selections. In other words, there was no demand for, for, for workers, and they would just be sent in. Uh, I think, for instance, when I think about the men of our, the head of our ghetto, about many, who many bad things can be said after all these, can say that he collaborated with the Nazis. In other words, he worked with them. But I think that I am alive, now, this is not a choice, but he did see to it that a lot of young people from our ghetto, from our area, that they were sent to Germany to work. And so I didn't go through Auschwitz, I may not have made it through they selection, and I went to a labor camp. Now, many of us didn't survive the labor camps either because of the Death March, and the concentration camps, and but, but there was that chance given, and I always feel that this, this Merrin, who had such dirty hands, may have saved some, some kids, some, some young people.

Now, I hate to ask you this, and you can tell me you won't do it if you can't, but we ran out before you finished telling about Hella, and I would like you to tell that story again, if you can.

Sure, sure. I'll try not to cry. Okay.

I had a bunk. I told you I started to work, so I had a bunk which I shared with another girl, and I had had typhus and typhoid, and I was, at this point well, I had gotten over both. And, one evening, my friend, Hella, came to see me. Hella was her name--Helen in English. Hella was not as close to me as Freda, but she was a good friend. (Noise in background) She was a good friend of mine, and she was a very lovely, gentle, girl, really lovely, very sweet, and I was very fond of her. And she was in this death

-------walk through the background.

beep

I, and I was extremely fond of her, and she was really sweet and gentle, and I could see she was sick, she was feverish, and she said to me, "Bella, would you let me sleep on your bunk tonight. I'm really sick. I don't feel well. And I would like to sleep on a bed. Would you please let me sleep with you?" And I looked at Hella, and she looked very sick to me, and I was very scared, and I was afraid that I'm going to get sick, and I said to her, "Hella, I am sorry, but I can't let you sleep on my bunk because I get sick." And I said to her, "Please forgive me, I can't let you do it." And she said to me, she was very lovely, she really was a nice, decent human being, and she said to me, "That's okay, Bella, I understand." And she just walked away. And she just, just walked away. I, I know that she died that night. And I know now that, maybe she knew she way dying, I don't know. I, I, she wanted to die with dignity maybe, and I didn't let her, and I never forgave myself for it. I never did.

Can you talk about liberation, uh, with the sugar and socks.

Yeah, okay. That's right, it's nice to end on a more cheerful note. Well, I remember a few things about liberation, which was wonderful. I remember, I was sick, they, they took the sick people first. They took us to hospitals, they quarantined us because they were afraid that we would, you know, spread the disease, but I was lucky. First of all, because I was so sick, the British, the, felt sorry for the inmates, we were hungry and walking skeletons, and they gave us their food rations, and I don't know whether this is recorded, but this is the truth, that a very high percentage of inmates in Bergen-Belsen died because they were given food that they had no business eating. There was dysentery. They, they, apparently because the food was so rich--Well, I couldn't eat it, so that was lucky. I was taken out of the camp, and I do remember a few things that were so memorable. I remember, sick as I was, that as the truck on which I was, I don't know, these were not ambulances, but I was, you know, I was comfortable. As it was leaving Bergen-Belsen, I could smell the fresh air. There was such a difference between the horrible stench of, of Bergen-Belsen, that I remember that I, I just took a deep breath. It was such a wonderful feeling. And, I also remember something else, because DDT is not allowed anymore, but they sprayed me with DDT, and it was just great because all the movement, all the itching, all the--stopped. All the lice that were, that were killing me, that were biting. All of it stopped. And it, I was at peace. It was a wonderful feeling. I'm forever grateful to DDT. And then I remember I was in the hospital. I don't remember how long I was there, I remember that, I do remember being pretty upset when I took a

look at myself because I really was a skeleton, but, uh, one of the soldiers who must have carried me maybe from the barrack or something remembered me, or maybe he, maybe he came to see who survived. Some of us didn't survive even the hospital, but he came to visit me. I, and, I think that he may have been a German Jew because I remember speaking to him German. And, uh, that was possible. He made have been in England, and volunteered, or was taken to the army and fought in Germany. So anyway, he brought me, but he was a British soldier. So he came in the first time, and I think, to see that I'm alive, he was glad to see, and he asked me what I want, and I remember I asked for two things. I wanted warm socks because it was May, and I was freezing, my feet were always cold, and I wanted sugar. So he came the following day or two days later, and brought me a pair of knee-length socks and a little bag of sugar, maybe it was a quarter pound, maybe less. And I do remember two things. I put on the, the socks, and I was very unhappy, I was crying because I didn't have any calves, and the knee-length socks wouldn't hold, they would, they, there was nothing to hold them up. And then I took the sugar, and I literally poured it into my mouth. And he got so upset that he went to see the nurse to ask, you know, whether I didn't do myself some harm, and I, I think the nurse told him that I was just craving sugar, and so, that was the....

I think I asked you everything. Thank you very much.

Um, I did want to add one thing, because you asked about God, and if you want me to, I can tell you that I did have a bit of a dintorah(ph), which means like a 'case' with my God, and for a long time, I really didn't want to have anything to do with religion. I was Jewish because I had survived as a Jew. But I, when I went to see my sister in 1959, and I walked the streets of Sahd, and, and went into the kibbutz, and went in, went into a synagogue in Jerusalem, I came back and I started to study. I started to learn Hebrew again, which I had, I had Hebrew before the war and during the war, and I studied the Torah, and I studied Jewish history, and I really became, I, switched. I was thinking of maybe becoming an accountant. I was also good with numbers. But, I decided to go into Jewish education, and I, I made peace with God because I decided that, that God was not responsible for Auschwitz. That we are free to make our choices. That's what a man is. Man is free to do the right thing and to do the wrong thing. We were taught what is right and what is wrong. And Auschwitz was the creation of evil men. And, and I don't think God is responsible for Auschwitz, men is.

So, what I just wanted to say is that how I, I made peace with God, I think, in that way that I, I do believe that...God was not in Auschwitz, as I said. Uh, I, I agree with a professor whose name is Packenheim(ph), who said that God was not in Auschwitz. And maybe, I do remember one thing

that when I talked to a rabbi years later, (clears throat), and I told him about my (cough) disagreement, my, my dintorah if you will, with God, which is uh kind of like having a court case with him, and he said, "Bella, you never lost your faith because one doesn't have a dintorah with something that one doesn't believe in." So that's how I have made peace with myself. In that sense.

Okay. Thank you.

This is room tone.