

Freddie Knoller (IWM SR 9092)

I mean we had, we lived with antisemitismus [antisemitism], you know it was nothing new to us, because we were born with it, it's not as it just happened because Hitler came to power.

They came all over the second district, where the Jews went, and put, painted the Jewish shops with 'Jude' – Jews – and made, and they told everyone 'you don't buy here' – you know, it's more or less a continuation of what just happened before in Germany, what they did. But a lot of Jews were beat, were beaten up, and in school it was already very dangerous because these 50% of Gentiles immediately felt very, very strongly and we had a continuous battle, you know, to defend ourselves against these antisemitic school boys. And it was very, very difficult actually to go to school, it was very, very difficult... The atmosphere it was just really frightening.

We heard on the radio that a German ambassador or somebody who worked in the German embassy in Paris was killed by a Jew or shot by a Jew and on that, in that program, there were speeches about, you know, about you know that revenge will be taken for that killing and more or less the same night we saw flames, the sky being all red, and we wondered what these are. We heard people run, we heard people, we heard the SA, the SA troops to go into houses and they arrested people from houses then. Fortunately they didn't come to our building, but we saw the sky being red, we thought well something there must be a fire. But the next day we went to school we saw, I saw, that the synagogue, which was our synagogue in the second district, it was burned down, and then we heard from our neighbours all the things that has happened the whole night, not only in Vienna but all over Germany. They revenged the death of the German by burning down all the synagogues, and by arresting, and this is when the whole of the, when the insecurity really for one's life started with the Jews in Vienna, that's when my parents were saying to my brothers and me that we gotta leave.

Toby Biber (IWM SR 19792)

This one morning, orders – 'get out, get out' – and whatever. By then we only had a few bits belongings – you, we grabbed the belongings and lined up to march to Plaszow. Plaszow is the outskirts of Krakow, and it, in Plaszow children were not allowed, older people were not allowed and there were shot on the spot. But some people took a chance and smuggled in some children in the bag, in the ruck sack, whatever way they could. Plaszow was a Jewish cemetery. When we got to Plaszow, as we arrived through the gates and it wasn't even ready – it was no huts even built for us – we saw already 3 men hanging. Frightened, I, I just don't know, and when I think back, we must have been completely already numb, without no feeling, we just obeyed and did what we had to do.

There were inspections by the Gestapo. So the children had no right to be there, so for some, something happened that they decided, they knew that, they found out that there are children in the camp, so they decided to set up a nursery. So of course the parents were glad, the children would be able, will be looked after in the nursery, so of course the children were put there. And it didn't take long, maybe two weeks after, we were standing on the appell, and the music was blaring – always in the most terrifying moments there was music. We see from a distance a lorry, an open lorry, with the children. Next to me was standing a mother with twins, two little girls, if there were 10, on the appell and they were going around looking – the Gestapo – if there was any children, or anybody that shouldn't be there, and these two children clinging to their mother, 'mother they're coming, they're going to take us away'. And so they did. And this lorry, while we were standing there on the appell, this lorry with the children drove off and never seen again. And that's how those parents lost their children, with a trick that the children will be looked after.

Well when I think back today – I don't know – how can anybody survive? The first two years when we were still at home, with family, and knowing the peasants in our town, it wasn't so bad, because the peasants were always helping, bringing us food, in exchange for other goods, but in the camps, that was impossible. And how we survived on this black water in the morning that was supposed to be coffee, or the grey soup at lunchtime with the little square of black bread that was like lime, and when we ate it, we didn't feel any different. It didn't satisfy in any way, and we were forever hungry...If you're tired, you're scared, you're hungry, lack of sleep and always in fear from one minute to the next, we didn't know what's going to happen to us.

Premysl Dobias (IWM SR 19781)

When we came to the railway station in Linz, before we went, we were taken out, we were cuffed together, two and two. We were taken and lined up on the railway station. I recall vividly that there were mostly women sitting waiting for trains, when one of them came closer and ask one of the armed officers who was guarding us, who we were. And he told her in German, I remember that closely, because I was nearby: 'Das sind die Feinde unseres Fuhrers' – these are the enemies of our Fuhrer. The woman then came and spat on us and the others, the other women then star...asked her what happened, she told him them who we were, then about a dozen of them came closer to us and all of them were spitting on us and shouting abuse.

The SS told us in German that they needed some prisoners who knew, who were from the farm who knew how to feed pigs, and they would then come every day from the camp direct to that farm to look after the pigs. Obviously everybody wanted to get away from the hard work in the camp and there were – all of them were volunteers. The SS told us he had to have only those who were from a farm and who knew, who spoke German. That eliminated a few Spaniards who were in the group, but we were mostly Czechs, and even some Czechs didn't know German. So finally the SS guard selected about, oh twenty prisoners, lined them up and I overheard the other one telling him: 'Du hast zu viele' – you have too many. So he started to push back a few, he pushed back two Spaniards, then he came to me, he pushed me back, and I was hoping so much to be able to be working on a farm, I was so hungry I hoped that I could actually eat with the pigs. So I came forward and in German, at attention, I told him that I was born on a farm and all I did all my life was feeding pigs – of course it was not true. But he very cruelly kicked me, I still have the mark on my leg, and pushed me back. When he had finally selected about a dozen, I believe dozen to fifteen, he told them: 'turn right, without step walk to that farm'. And both of them remained behind the group which was marching very happily to the farm. That part of the camp was separated by guards and the guards had machine-guns to guard the outlines of the camp. We were very upset that we were left behind, and looked with envy at those who were marching to that farm. But suddenly we heard machine-gun shooting from two sides and with horror we noticed that all the prisoners who were marching to that farm, crossed the so-called border and were gunned down dead. I could have been one of them. Then the SS turned back, laughingly came back to our Kommando, we again stood at attention and one of them laughingly said 'who else knows how to feed pigs?' That is an experience which will haunt me all my life.

It's a tremendous nightmare, nightmare to such an extent, that I could have never believed that a nation, civilized nation, which gave the world musicians, poets, experts in every field of science, how they could have been fooled by a maniac like Hitler is something which I will never understand.

Maria Ossowski (IWM SR 19794)

Eventually we were herded into what was to be our washing room. It was a huge barrack, with the water running, cold water I must add, from the, from the, from the, the top, there were men in already prison garb, which we never seen before. We were made to strip, we were made to go in front – each one of us – in front of that man, that man or the other one, they were all standing in the line, and we were shaven – we were shaven – our heads were shaven, our private parts were shaven and we were pushed then under that water. And after a while we were pushed out of it into another part of that big block, where the huge amount of terrible-looking – and already smelling terrible – clothes were prepared for us. What we actually got was one dress which you had to put over your head. The dress had sleeves, but not long, like three-quarter sleeves, and when we have had this on, we were marched again to another part, where the girls this time – prisoners obviously – were sitting by the little tables,

and that, and then where we were getting our numbers tattooed on our arms. It was done with simply – Biro's were not invented then – so it was just implement with which you write letters in those days, and it was put into the ink and the point was made on your arm 'til it had the shape of the number.

You actually are asking me what, what made me survive, or what helped me survive. And this answer is the one which actually brings you pain all your next life, this normal life, because you never know why. So the easiest thing is to say, yes, God wanted it, that was supposed to be that way, but there were more human factors in it. The fact that I was not, that I was young, that I was not ravaged by the long-term imprisonment in prison... I told myself very quickly that I don't want to die there, and the, this psychological attitude help you enormously. You were never to feel sorry for yourself. If you started to feel sorry for yourself you were a goner, you, you, you, you were Muselmann, as we were calling those who were physically and mentally broken.

When we came, of course, we knew nothing. I, I knew nothing. I didn't know about the extermination policy or – we knew that the ghettos were, were burning and the people were killed in the ghettos... To see it with my own eyes was really a terrible shock and I can tell you one thing, that there is point in your life where your heart is no heart anymore, it's a piece of ice. I had the feeling that my heart was hard, and not because I didn't have feeling for my fellow prisoners – no, that I always had – but there was this hand, this iced hand which kept hold my heart like this. And my heart were not alive any more, it was – the sheer terror of it made my, part of my body almost turn into the ice.

Albin (Alex) Ossowski (IWM SR 19795)

Often children, out of hunger, escaped, through little holes in the, and went hiding on stairs in big houses, but people were afraid to take them on. Sometimes the families took them, washed them, fed them, but were afraid to keep them, because if the Germans found out that they are hiding some Jewish people, they punish one, the punishment was one – they were shot. And out of spite sometimes the Germans used to shoot the, their own children and left for some weeks the Jewish children, to give a lesson to the Polish families not to hide Jews.

In Warsaw, like in – some Polish people were like hyenas. They were going on the streets and picking up Jews and denouncing them to Germans. For that they got some money. If that thing was found out, first thing they were warned out about it, and told you'll be shot. But some of these hyenas ignored it, keep on doing it, so they were simply shot, like dogs, animals. And a card was written on the body – 'This man denounced Jews', and before the body was removed, a lot of people could read this writing, and had probably different thoughts to keep doing it, and later it was quite stopped because the underground was ruthless with these sorts of doings.

The most tragic contact we had in the, in the, in the camp where I went to work was with the Sonderkommando, with the Jewish people who worked in the crematorium. They, what they described, what they had to do, was so horrible, one man said that in the group he had to burn the bodies of his wife and his children. He was crying all night and you couldn't help him anything. And they, the Sonderkommando lived under a sentence of death... and I think in '43, when the Germans tried to transport Sonderkommando out of crematorium number 5, they rebelled. They killed a few SS, I was told that one SS man was thrown alive into the oven, and they tried to escape.

The hospital was next to gypsy camp, so we had quite a lot of contact with the gypsy, talking, talking. I had a sort of girl which I talked to quite a lot, and in '44, '43, don't remember that, they started a selection in gypsy camp, and I told this girl who was quite fragile, try to get work. But of course she wasn't chosen, and the women and men were transported out, and the next night all the gypsies were taken to number five and four and gassed. Killed.

Daniel Falkner (IWM SR 19783)

And of course then came the ghetto, and this was a terrible upheaval. Thousands and thousands of people had to move in and out, those Poles who lived among the Jews had to move out from this designated area and the designated area was only a small corner of Warsaw, the most dilapidated part

of Warsaw and the Jews who lived throughout Warsaw had to move in. And this was a period which is imprinted on my mind, people with, with all sorts of chattel moving in and out.

And of course the living conditions were impossible, every, every cellar, every corridor was full, filled with people. And many couldn't find even this and they slept in the street. The result was that every morning the undertakers had to collect bodies from the streets.

In July 1942 the German authorities announced that to ease up your loss, you can volunteer to go to the East and there you will be provided with work and food and clothing and so forth. They were not specific to say where to the East, what is the name of the place where you are going, and what sort of work you are going to, to have to perform. And many thousands of volunteers came forward to be sent to the East. Every day about six thousand volunteers were sent off, not to be seen or heard of again. And then when these volunteers started to become thin on the ground, the Germans made traps in the, arranged traps in the street, and whoever was caught in the trap was sent off. And among those were old people, disabled people, blind people or children, and they were packed to capacity in those cattle-trains and sent off. And one or two of those who were sent off came back and said 'this is all a lie, this, we are, they are being sent only a few tens of kilometres away from, from Warsaw to a place called Treblinka and there they are being exterminated completely'.

You see the human nature is such that this is a thing that is incomprehensible, no one, no one can take it in that someone is planning a complete annihilation or murder of a whole people, this is inconceivable.

Magdalena Kusserow Reuter (IWM SR 19793)

They told us, they said, my father especially, he taught us, he said 'Look, Heil Hitler' means the salvation comes by Hitler, but if we learned by the Bible that the salvation comes from, by Jesus Christ and so my father say you yourself has to choose. I don't say you must say 'Heil Hitler' and you must not say. You have to do like you want it. But he said, he taught us what happened, and he said also by the Bible, the Bible tells us the real Christian will be persecuted. So my father said 'We have to count', he said, 'that one day maybe they will persecute us also and the Bible say some will be killed because of the faith, belief in Christ' – but I thought it will not be killing, it will not be in our own families, or I never was thinking about it until it came.

My brother Wilhelm, it was about one year ago, he got a letter then and he wrote 'I'm condemned to death, please visit me' and my mother and I, we went to Munster to the prison – we visit my brother Wilhelm and he was so strong and my mother nearly cried. She said 'I would like to die for you' and he said 'No mother I will make it, I want it', it was already over – and then he wrote a last letter to us and this makes us more strong. We thought if Wilhelm is so strong in his faith, he will make it, because there's nothing wrong to believe in the Bible. And before they brought me to concentration camp, in Bielefeld, my other brother Wolfgang, he got then the invitation to go to the milli, to the military, to the war and he visit, it was the last visit. He visit me in Bielefeld and he said 'Look Magdalena I, I have now the letter to go to the war, but of course I will refuse, I will not go'. And, then this was the last time I saw him. And I reached in concentration camp in February and he was beheaded in March, one month later. But the police, the woman of the wife of this police in Bielefeld, she said 'Oh crazy, your brother, the Gestapo offered him to, to bring him in the concentration camps and maybe he could save his life, but now for sure they will kill him' and ok, they killed him later on.