

Jadzia Stern Part 1

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>> Stern: ...human beings and everybody experiences.

>> Interviewer: Right.

>> Stern: But they could have -- there were so many different camps and cities and --

>> Interviewer: Yes. We're going to begin now, okay? would you please tell me your name, your full name, and where you were born?

>> Stern: My name is Jadzia Stern, and I was born in Poland in a little town named Wloszczowa. For people to -- when they're going to look on the map, it's near Krakow, where the Pope is from.

>> Interviewer: How many children were there in your family?

>> Stern: I come from a very big family. My parents had eight brothers and sisters, and my grandparents had eight children. So I remember being very happy, surrounded by a lot of love, a lot of uncles, a lot of aunts, and a lot of cousins.

>> Interviewer: And they all lived in this same little, small area?

>> Stern: Small area, that's right. 1935 or '36 -- like I said, it's a very small, little town. The population of Jewish people must have been like 2,500, and the population of the Gentiles must have been the same. So when our children got a little bit older -- I was a middle child. My father thought that moving to a larger city would be better for us, so we moved to Będzin. Must have been '35 or '36 because I was in the third grade.

>> Interviewer: What did your father do?

>> Stern: My father had a small business like a country store, and most his business, he conducted with farmers, like farming boots and the equipment for farming. My mother used to be the smartest lady on the block. You would call her a home economic teacher. She was a Hebrew school teacher, and she knew everything. She taught us how to sew and how to cook. She made us children watch her. She was knitting and crocheting, and she was a very smart lady. She -- when they murdered her, she was 42 years old. So looking back, I can say that my family life was very loving, and I remember the town being -- had a lot of greenery, a lot of trees, particularly in Wloszczowa, where I grew up. But also I remember that I felt different.

>> Interviewer: Were you treated differently?

>> Stern: I was treated differently. I was called names. I knew that it had something to do with me being Jewish. And I didn't understand the meaning of it, why they were discriminating or ugly graffiti, later on, when I knew how to read in Polish, first, second grade. But I knew since I was five or six years old that by me being Jewish had something to do with it. Later on I find out that the pogroms -- I heard from my parents and grandparents -- they took place in Wloszczowa and other small, little towns. And they're harassing the Jewish people, in particular on the Christians' holidays, like Easter and Christmastime. I'm going to best illustrate to you by remembering a little story, very short, and I want to tell it to you. Living in Wloszczowa, where half of the population were Christian and half Jewish, naturally I had a lot of Christian friends. And till the age of the first grade, I really didn't know any difference. We loved each other. I had a little friend, Janka [phonetic]. It's a Polish name. She was the same age. Her parents had a lot of children, and the parents of Janka were friends with my parents. So I felt very comfortable with my little friend. I went into her house playing like usually normal children do. Naturally we didn't have all the toys children have now, but we played. We had the open space, and we would discuss

maybe the first day of school. But I remember that particular year, we both went to first grade in September, and then sometime in the spring, during Easter time, Janka would knock on my -- our apartments or homes were first floor, so any child could walk and play with the children without difficulty, going through stairs or elevators, so forth. She would knock on my window door, and she would say, "Jadzia, I cannot play with you today." I said, "what's the matter?" And she would say, "My mommy told me you killed Jesus." I said, "I didn't do it. It must have been my cousin next block." And I start asking questions, my mother, why she said this. Well, she didn't want to tell me. She said, "As you will grow older, you will read, and you will learn." After two or three days, she would come back, and she said, "I don't believe what my mother said." And we played, and I forgot about it. But later on, when the Holocaust broke out, and I was by that time -- well, I was -- when I was taken to the ghetto, 12 years old. And I surely knew all about it. I knew I was different. I knew the hatred for the Jew in Europe was engraved in my soul. I didn't like it, and I didn't understand fully, but I knew that the people in Europe, particularly in Poland, where I was brought up, pointed a finger wherever I went. They didn't say my name was Jadzia Stern -- or Sklarz, my maiden name. They would say, "Here's the Jewish little girl, but she is nice. Let's play with her." So there was discrimination and hatred for the Jew I remember from the very early age, and that hurts. Today, as I look back, I can see nothing has changed because in 1939, in Będzin, when I was supposed to go to the fifth grade, the Germans invaded our town, and they start terrorizing the Jews.

>> Interviewer: what did they do? what were some of the things that you saw or that happened to you and your family?

>> Stern: I lived across the street the synagogue in Będzin. It's also a small, little town. It's a southern town. I didn't know about the -- what was going to -- what does it mean to be in a war or they invaded Poland. And I saw my parents looking

out the windows, and they didn't let their children -- we were five at home because my older sister was already at the time 20 years old, and she was married. My oldest brother, who is now in the 70s, was in Polish army, and one brother, my father gave him a few dollars, a few zlotys, Polish money, to go, to go away from Poland and try to save his life because, looking back, the older people already knew what's going to happen because from a year before from the Crystal Night. They must have read in the papers, and many Jewish people in Poland and Będzin and Włoszczowa, where I lived, had relatives leaving Germany and coming to Poland, thinking that life might be easier for them. So when they invaded Poland, to me it was just like a shock, but my parents already knew what's in store.

>> Interviewer: But you were 12 at this time.

>> Stern: I was 12. I was 12 years old. I was 12 when I went -- when they sent us to the ghetto. Because after a couple of years -- in 1942 or '43, they made us move from our homes, and they created a part of the farmland in Poland, in Będzin, and they made us move in and take only what you could take in a small, little suitcase and what you can carry to, like a hut or like where farmers stored vegetables and, you know, farm things, hay and their goods. By that time, I was 12 already, and I knew -- that was such a trauma because I wasn't allowed to go to school. We were not allowed to take any books with us. The Gentile children attended school, and from the hut in the ghetto, across the street, I could see children my age in the morning getting ready for school, and here we were, cramped in the ghetto with very little food. I saw my parents' eyes full of pain. My little sister -- I had sisters from age three, five, seven, ten, and myself. Disease started plaguing the families. There was no medication. A certain amount of foods were only allowed, and you could only walk around just around your house and maybe across the street. You were not allowed to go anywhere else. How we survived, I don't know, and we were there when -- we were there till '40 -- excuse me. The ghetto started around

1940. In 1942 or '43, they made orders -- they called it *judenrein*, which means that they cleaned up the place from the Jewish people. They were going to send trucks and send us to Auschwitz to gas and murder us, and so in *Deutsch* -- in the language of the -- the German language, this was called *judenrein*, which means, "clean of Jews."

>> Interviewer: Did you know at this time about people being cremated and murdered and -- or was this something -- you only knew that people were leaving? What did you know at that time?

>> Stern: Well, at the age of 12, I didn't know much because the older -- the parents and grandparents who were in the ghetto, the older people, they didn't have nothing else to do because they couldn't work. They couldn't walk. But secretly, some of the parents who were teachers or the [indistinct] teachers or those who knew how to knit occupied the children. We -- they did it in every neighborhood because the ghetto was tremendous. It was -- I mean, my ghetto occupied like 2,500 people, so it was a big, fenced-around ghetto, I mean, a place designated just for us. So I really don't know, but looking back, sometime secrets would leak out because, you know, secrets don't stay when people go into Germany, they're coming from Germany, and some of the Gentiles had newspapers, and sometimes a kind Gentile would leave a paper near somebody's, you know, fence that he could reach out. So there were rumors that, that when they take us from the ghetto to the boxcars or cattle cars, most of the people going to be gassed. But my father said, "It cannot be because Germany is the most civilized country in the world." Germany, who produced so many musicians, he just couldn't believe. I heard them whisper that they are making from the skin of the Jewish bodies, they make lampshades. From the bones, they're grinding up, they're making fertilizer. From human fat, they're making soap. I always was curious when the grownups were meeting, what they're talking about. But sooner or later, I find out myself. So the ghetto, we could have survived with little food and with nothing to do, with no heat, with very poor

conditions, if they would have left us alone because people would have taken a seed from apples or from an orange, they would have planted, and they would have nourished the children. But unfortunately, it was in 1942 that my father made a hiding place when he find out that in a couple days, the Germans are going to come in and round up the Jewish people, put them in boxcars, and we'll all have to go to Auschwitz. Looking back, how foolish that was, but that was a last-minute, like you're drowning and you see a sharp knife, and you want to hold on to it.

>> Interviewer: Was there -- let me back up just before you go on with this. Was there any attempt by any of the people in the ghetto to organize a resistance?

>> Stern: I'm sure it was, but I was too young to remember. I'm sure it was. The young people went to the fields and --

>> Interviewer: They were allowed out to work.

>> Stern: Not the Jewish people in the ghetto. They didn't do nothing. But the young people secretly would go and fight because I understand later on, when I read up after I was liberated, that there were a lot of underground resistance. The biggest was in Warsaw. But also in smaller cities, they tried to work with the Gentiles, but it was very hard, I understand. They wouldn't give them, sell them, you know, ammunition or guns to protect themselves. But I'm sure it was. My brother, who was 17 years old, and my father gave him just like 10, 20 zlotys, which -- let's say dollars -- "Go," he said, "and do the best so you can survive." So I'm sure he got involved with the underground. He never survived because we never heard from him. And before we go any further talking about my family background, let me tell you that from 2,500 people in the little town that I was born, Wloszczowa, nobody survived except three people from my family who consisted of 65 people that I remember, aunts, uncles, cousins, and my own family. It's my sister, my oldest one who's 76 years old. She's in Israel. And I came here to the United

States because my husband had some relatives. And I have another brother.

>> Interviewer: And you were the only three who survived from that town.

>> Stern: From the whole family and from the whole city, from Wloszczowa. I haven't heard from anybody who is alive today.

>> Interviewer: So did you go immediately from the ghetto to Auschwitz?

>> Stern: Well, not immediately. That's what I wanted --

>> Interviewer: Tell me.

>> Stern: -- tell you about it. My father decided -- my father was a very tall, healthy, muscular man. He knew a lot of non-Jewish friends. He had a lot of non-Jewish friends, and he depended on them, and some of them did help him to bring some straw, so he put it in the attic. It was big room, hot like this one, maybe half the size, with one stove. You know, they call it pot-belly, that you could one pot on it, and it provided a little heating for the wintertime. He lined the floor on the attic with a lot of straw. That was the preparation. He bought a lot of -- you know, you were given certain coupons for a little food, so I'm sure that some of his friends must have dropped off a couple sacks of cabbage and apples. He put it in the attic. He filled every pot and every bucket with water, and the night before, we went up to the attic. He locked up the windows. He kind of nailed them with boards like nobody's here, left the door opened downstairs, and we took only pajamas and the little bit of food we could gather. And he was thinking that maybe the war's going to be over in a week or two because the provision wouldn't have lasted more than that, by eating an apple a day and having a little bit of water. So one day, two days after, two, three days -- I don't know how long we were up there. I cannot recall. But we were there a few days. Somebody must have told on my father that he has a family and he took them to the

attic, even though the door downstairs was open and the windows were closed with boards, regular boards. So one morning we get up, and we manage to get a few -- secretly we got some books for myself and my sister, and we were reading the same thing all of every day. We hear knocks on the door -- not on the door, but on the attic. He must have gotten a rifle, the Nazi, and banged on the attic. And he said, "I know somebody's up there. *Raus*," which means "Come down." He started banging so hard, and I remember the looks. My mother looked at my father, and they froze. They looked at the five children, and I -- when I dream now -- because that experience left me with -- very, very traumatic. I still live with the Holocaust. No matter how happy moments I had here in the United States, I always remember the Holocaust. It changed me forever. So when I dream at nighttime, I don't remember their faces no more, but I can see eyes full of pain. My father answered, he's coming down. He said, and he's going to put the ladder down. There was a tall ladder going down with a lot of climbing. As he was taken, he asked -- also I remember, "How much *leute*," which means how many people, "is up there?" My father said, "Six," instead of seven. We have five children and my mother and my father. My three eldest were already separate, one in the army, like I said. In the commotion, my father was trying to get my three-year-old, my five-year-old, my seven-year-old, my nine-year-old, and their names, by the way -- Celia was my little sister, three-year-old; my five-year-old was Rosalyn; and then my seven-year-old was my little brother Jacob that my grandchild is named after. And then next was my sister Sabina, who was only year younger than I was. She must have been 11. I was 12. And my father gets the little children, gets them together, and they start crying, and my mother turns to me, and she said -- puts her finger on her lips, and she said, "Jadzia, darling, I will have to leave you. You have to crawl into this trunk." It was an old trunk that they managed to bring to the ghetto. And I got stiff. I said, "Mother, I'm not staying here by myself." She took me in her arms, and she said, "Listen, Jadzia. You're the oldest. I'm not

taking you with me, but you will survive." She handed me her ring, and she put me down, and I kept my hand so she couldn't close it. I said, "Please, Mama, let me go with you." She said, "You will be all right. Here's the ring, and I pray for you." As she turned to the, to the ladder to go, now she turned back to me. She squeezed me hard. She said, "I love you so much, but I've got to leave you. You're going to live. You are brave." She closed the top so hard with that latch -- I don't think she knew what she was doing -- and she went down. I was laying like in a coffin. I was laying, and I heard my father wanted to bargain with the Nazis. He said, "Don't hurt my children, please." And I heard screams, and I heard my mother. There's a Jewish custom that we have a parchment above the door which represents the Torah, the five books of Moses. And looking back, I think she wanted me to hear her voice. She kissed the mezuzah, we call it, and she said, "Good-bye, dear God," so loud that I was wondering that the Nazi didn't hit her. That's the last time I heard their voices. I don't remember how long I was in that coffin, in the trunk, but when I quiet down and I came to myself -- and I must tell you that the reason I could cope with that moment is the upbringing I had. I was always told by my mother the values of myself. She told me as a person and as a Jewish girl, she told me, "We are better, you are better because we don't do those things to others." So I always remember those words. So I became courageous, but it took me about 15 minutes to pry that hook that tried to put it on -- she didn't mean to. The second time, I don't know. She -- because she was shaking. I have never seen eyes so full of pain, but I knew that's the way it has to be. I got myself together, I pried, finally, open that hook that was connected to the closed trunk, and I got out. It was dark already, so it must have been -- because that was morning. It must have been a long time I must have laid in that trunk, paralyzed. And I was thinking, What should I do? I said, Mama, what did you mean that I survive? How could I survive? The farmhouse had four little openings, without glass, maybe 8 x 8, on every -- east, north, south, west. I went to every corner on

this attic, and I look out, and it's dark, and I see fire. I see a line of people. So I said, It's too dark for me to go, but then I said, The fire might turn to this farmhouse, and I get burned alive. I must have stayed there because it was next day -- I must have curled -- I must have been very tired because I found myself kneeling or sitting in one corner, and I don't remember. I must have slept because it was 6:00, 7:00 in the morning the next day. It was already -- or maybe earlier, 5:00 or 6:00 -- that I realized what situation I was in. And I had so much courage at 12 years old. I haven't found a little girl nowadays that could act -- I couldn't repeat the same thing today. I went down. I looked around. It was like after a pogrom. Evidently my mother tried to find something for the children to wear, my father something, because we all were in pajamas upstairs. So I go down, and I try to find my school clothes, my school dress that my mother used to make us. She used to make us beautiful sailor dresses because that was the look -- that's what we had to wear. It was a navy skirt with a sailor collar top. I also found some high boots and knee socks. My hair was shoulder long, very thick, brown hair. I couldn't find a brush. I couldn't find soap to wash my face. So I found a ribbon, and the best I could, with my saliva, I brush my hair, and I put my ribbon on. And I said, I've got to have a plan. And God gave me a thought. He said, Jadzia, you take a school book in your arm, and when you go out, and if a Nazi stops you, you tell him you're not Jewish. And that's what I did. I got dressed, I put the ribbon in my hair, I put the book in my hand, and I put my head up, and I started walking, just one block, and what I saw, you never want to see it in your life. You saw blood. You saw bodies. You saw watches. You saw diamonds that the women had to take off because the Nazis probably tried to come back later and take all the silver and the gold. You saw pieces of bread. You saw any article that you can imagine. I had to kind of cross over to walk that block, but I walked. A young Nazi stops me. He must have been in the early 20s. And he looked straight in my eyes, and he said to me, "Where are you going?" in German. And I

said, "I just came to visit my Jewish friend. I miss her. And I'm afraid to stay here." He was surprised. He didn't know what to do with me. Then he said -- he grabbed me by my shoulder, and he said, "I'm going to take you to my superior because I really don't believe you." So as he took me, another block I walked with him. There was a brick building where the Nazis were drinking beer, smoking cigarettes -- from terrorizing and pushing the people to the boxcars were resting there. As he went in, I saw a Jewish man sweeping the floor. I said, "Please, I told the Nazi a lie. Tell me what to do. I'm afraid." He said, "Little girl, look around you. Look at the lines everywhere. What do you think he's going to do with you? Where is he going to send you, do you think? Where is your home? This is a ghetto, and it's burning. Run!" he says to me. So I started running. I ran. I ran. I ran miles because the lines were as big as the whole city lined up. And all of a sudden, I see a young mother, 19 or 20 years old, maybe a four- or five-month-old baby in her hand. And she's cutting her wrist and the baby's. That's the first time I've ever seen anything like this. Then I look, I see the Nazis about a few feet away, a Nazi standing with a rifle, and he laughs. I couldn't believe my eyes. Then the people start pushing me, saying, "Little girl, you're holding up the lines. What's the matter with you?" And then I heard a shot. He shoot the baby first. Then, he shoot the woman. And as I was going up the boxcar -- it had about two or three steps -- I was numb. I wasn't hungry no more. I must have not eaten, three or four days. And the journey from the ghetto to Auschwitz took two nights and two days. And we couldn't sit; standing room only. Sometime you would just stoop down. And all I could think is the killing of the baby and the killing of the young mother, and that's the first killing I've ever seen.

>> Interviewer: So you went to Auschwitz when you were 13.

>> Stern: When I arrived --

>> Interviewer: Almost 13.

>> Stern: Right. About 12, because my birthday's in April, and that was in the fall, like September, 1942. Yeah. We saw a big sign, Auschwitz, *Oświęcim*. When we got there, it's like a nightmare again, like hell. You see Nazis sitting on tall stools with dogs by their sides, and with just -- with one finger would determine your destiny. It would determine if you go to the good side or to the bad side. The good side meant going to Auschwitz and work there. To the bad side meant you're going to be gassed and to the crematorium. So I -- when it was my turn, I was avoiding standing before him because usually, people came down with their families. I was left alone, and I didn't know what to do, if he's going to send me -- if I was old enough to be sent to work, or he's going to send me to the left side. Turned out the left was bad, and the right was good. I was so many times in bad predicaments, but from that day on, I said, I'm not going to go willingly to the bad side. When it was my turn to come, the Nazi said, "Forward," and I stood. He must have sent me to the bad side because the people start yelling to me, "Little girl, run to the other side. You don't belong here. Run!" And I ran from the bad side to the good side. When I finally got to Auschwitz, you stood in front a lady, and she was in charge. And you were told, whatever you had with you, and I had a little jewelry that my mother gave me. She gave me her ring, and she gave me her grandfather's clock, or watch. She wore a big chain, and she gave that to me, thinking maybe across the street I run and give them that little jewelry, maybe they would hide me. But it didn't dawn on me. I didn't want to go because all these months that we live there, nobody came over or smuggled themselves. I don't know if they were allowed to come or not. But if you are neighbors for so many months -- and they knew we were starving. You know, at one time of the day or night, they could have come and made known that they are thinking about us, that they want to help us, but they didn't, so I didn't even think about it. So I was standing there, and I went into this room where you're supposed to undress. They told you to undress. And I noticed dozens of little hills. One was for the jewelry,

one was for shoes, one was for clothes, and one was for glasses. And I looked out. I looked around myself. I said, I must be dreaming. I saw people far away, walking with dropped shoulders. I look up, and I see it's dark, and I said, It couldn't be. Since I was in the ghetto, it was dark. So a prisoner is walking through, and I said, "Tell me, what's going on here?" And he said, "Little girl, you will find out soon enough." In the meantime, I was pushed to the first line, which meant they shaved your long hair. To me, it was so traumatic, seeing my brown, long hair falling on the floor. Next, I see they're grabbing my arm, and they're putting this tattoo on. Then, I start crying and shaking, and the Nazis are watching me and laughing, and at one point, that I put, I just -- not willingly gave this lady, the German lady, the arm. He came with his revolver and put my chin up. He said, "If you're not going to behave, you're going to be dead." So then they gave me this white and blue prison dress. Thank God, it was so long, it was dragging the floor. When you were little, they gave you big. When you were big, they gave you something small. Next thing I knew, they gave me wooden shoes, Holland shoes, and that's all I would -- yeah, they gave me a little spoon, a string to put around my waist, and a little bowl, and that was all I was given, and I was waiting for somebody to take me to my cell. When I finally got there, I look around. There was no floor. There were cells with three layers of plain wood. You had no blanket, no sweater. It was already very cold, September, and the people -- it was empty. They must have been at work, and the lady who appointed me, she said, "You go the third one," because there are only five over there, and at nighttime, there were six people. We had to turn on one side because you couldn't move. And we all made up our -- they told me which side we're going to sleep tonight, right or left, right or left. You couldn't move. Next day I already went to work, and my work consisted at that time when I came of -- it was ammunition. It was an ammunition factory, and we were given an instrument, and you had to test it, if it's good or bad. At that time, I knew what's good. One

box was for no good, and one box was a good ammunition, ready for use. In the summertime, they made us work in the fields, planting -- I don't even know what we planted. They'd make us dig and weed, and if it was potatoes, we had to pick them up. Sometimes we would wash them, we would rub them off on the prison dress -- we were so hungry -- and ate the raw potatoes. The food consisted of one piece of bread, sometime a slice of margarine, a piece of margarine, a teaspoon, or a slice of bologna; sometime just a piece of bread and margarine. In the evening you were given a little watery soup. That's why you had the bowl and the spoon. You had no underwear. You had no toothbrush. You only took a bath once a month, and they called it -- the dress that you were wearing, they were spraying with disinfection -- with some kind of liquid to kill the lice and the germs --

>> Interviewer: Disinfectant.

>> Stern: That's right.

>> Stern: Sometime, if you were lucky, because they had so many sweaters left from us, from the people that they could have given us something to wear. So an epidemic started in the camp. Typhoid fever broke out, and that next spring -- it must have been '42 -- '43 -- I had very high fever, and they begged me, the older ladies -- older ladies. They were 25 or 30. When you were over 40, you were not taken there. They said, "If you can, get dressed and come. Otherwise, after a day or two, they're going to take you to the crematorium." But I just couldn't. I must have had a 105 fever. I was so thirsty and so weak. They did have -- they called it a hospital, "rewir." It was like portable, in case people from other countries come to see if you're treating the people good, if you're giving good medical care. Once -- you could only stay there one or two days. After two days, they made an announcement, the lady in charge of this hospital, and she would -- her announcement would go like this. We give you five minutes, maybe ten. Can you hear me? If you're

not going down from the bed you are lying, the Nazis are coming, and trucks are being lined up outside. So if you can hear me, if you can climb down, you're going to be sent back to your barrack. A couple hours before, I was dreaming that somebody's giving me cold lemonade, and I felt so good, and I heard the voice, and the voice I heard inside is, Jadzia, go down. Jadzia, go down. You can make it. I couldn't hardly sit up because when I tried to sit up, it was like a merry-go-round. Everything was just blurry. I looked around. I didn't see a single soul sitting up. I took my two hands and lift up one leg, and then I lifted up the next one. And then I tried to get down where I was lying, and I tried to steady myself, and I was lucky that the space between one bed and the other one was very narrow, so I could hold on. And I took a deep breath, and I prayed to God. I said, "Please, God, I know everything what's going on. Don't make me go to the gas chambers." And while I was praying, I could hold on, and I saw the Nazi was coming to look at me, and you had to stay still for two minutes. He didn't leave you to see if you can walk. And I stood, and he even said, "Look up," and I had to look. And I stood straight. Finally, he left me. And the lady in charge of the hospital came to me. She said, "You can leave now." I was relieved that he left me, that I could stand up. I go out. It was dark. I'm telling you, it was darkness always. It was a step that I had to make from this little hospital, from the portable hospital, to the barrack that I was. I had to walk a block, and it was cold. It must have been 5:00, 6:00 in the evening. I had to sit to help my legs to reach the Earth, the ground, and for a moment, I almost forgot what number my barrack was. But after an hour's struggle, going slowly, being frozen to death, I made the block. I didn't recognize nobody. There were new people. It changed every few days because if you were older -- and you knew already, by that time, what the smoke meant -- and if you had children on your own -- if you were 30 years old and you had a couple of children, you just couldn't live, knowing that they were destroyed, murdered. So they died from heartbreak. I remember a few ladies even went to the wires. They

didn't want to live because conditions were horrible. After a while, you forgot who you are because all you were occupied with is the hunger, starvation. You were so hungry. Some people, when you were given the ration, tried to save half of the piece of bread for next day. I ate it up soon as I got it to my hand, and maybe that's what saved me because they got -- they didn't eat enough, and they tried to save it, and they died of starvation anyway. I mean, I don't know if that saved me or my will, but like I said, it changed around. Soon I got to know a lady or she got to know me, I lost her. But they all told me, after work -- they called me little girl. "You're going to live, and you must tell, wherever you're going to be, the world, what a civilized people, the Nazis, did to us." During Christmastimes, you could hear -- the only time you know what season it was, snow or the Nazis singing Christmas songs, and they were people who wore crosses around their necks, sung holy songs during Christmastime because our block, our cell, was next to the little chapel they had. The next day, they would go out and murder little children. Sometime when we went to work in the morning, 6:00, we could see away a few blocks, the way little children are being lined up. A certain direction we knew went to the ovens. I cannot tell you how this experience changed my life. I would be entirely a different person because I constantly live with the thought of the Holocaust. I have four married children, and I had wonderful, wonderful time with them, and they celebrated their Bar Mitzvahs -- you must know what it is --

>> Interviewer: Yes.

>> Stern: -- religious services for a boy who reaches the age of 13 -- and weddings, but not for one moment have I forgot -- not the faces, but the words these people -- I don't remember their names, but the sad eyes. They say, Jadzia, and sometimes, Little Girl, you must tell the world what they did to us. I was several times on the dead row. As I said, very often epidemics broke out. One day -- and there were selections in the camp. I don't remember if every week or every few days, but no matter what

season, you had to undress completely, and they had to -- they looked you over, the Nazis. Mengele was the one who did the selections. And from '42 till '45 or '44 -- '44 was already the dead march -- but let me tell you about the selections. I took off my dress, and this nice lady looks at me, and she said, "You're not going out. You got" -- I don't know what you call it in English, hives that itch and comes from not hygienic conditions and malnutrition. I was covered with red hives from my neck to my knees. She said, "You cannot go out. They're going to take -- you're going to go on the truck." I said, "What should I do?" They were undressing by the steps. She said, "Pull a few dresses and go underneath. There's nothing you can lose because you're not going -- he's not going to let you go back in." I did this. I went under the few prison dresses, covered myself up, and I passed. I mean, nobody missed me outside. When she came in, she said to me, "I have no medication for you, but I can tell you one thing that might help you. Take the little bowl, and next morning, or now, when you need to urinate, urinate and put it on your body. Do this till the next selection." I don't know. God must have been with me. Would you believe it helped me? My urine helped me, this rash to disappear, at least getting paler. So when they came a week later, I don't remember if she made me stay again inside, but after a while, it just left me. So you can see, many times, if I wouldn't have that courage, if I would have given up, I wouldn't be here to tell you this story. But what kept me is my mother's words. In the lowest moments, I kept hearing her saying, "You will survive. You must survive. As long as you can breathe and you can walk, you're going to survive." And that kept me. Any time -- if we wanted to know what season, like I said, the wintertime, we saw snow because Poland is cold nine months, and it's snow on the ground maybe from March till -- September till March. So one spring, it must have been 1944 -- because the dead march was 1944 in December when the Allies got closer to the camps --

>> Interviewer: Yes.

>> Stern: -- they made us leave Auschwitz, and they tried to destroy everything they could and take the prisoners with them. But it must have been in the spring because I noticed a little sunflower behind the wires. Some parts of the wires were not electric, but most of them -- I don't know for sure how many feet. And I notice it was a little hole already dug, and it was on my way to the bathroom. It was one major bathroom in the middle of the camp for everybody. If you were sick and lived in a barrack that's about two or three blocks away, you were in bad shape. But everybody went to the general bathroom. Mind you, it had no water, no toilet tissue. But I notice on my way, running to this bathroom, a sunflower, and I had to stop, no matter how I needed to go to the bathroom. I stopped, but I didn't even notice that the soldiers were watching you on the -- what you call it -- the, you know, those high --

>> Interviewer: The guard towers?

>> Stern: Watchtowers.

>> Interviewer: Yes.

>> Stern: Watchtowers. I didn't even notice, but I stooped down, and the ground was almost -- somebody tried to dig it out and get to the flower because it was just 2 inches away from the wire. And I stooped down and wanted so bad that sunflower, and I almost got it by the root when this Nazi starts shouting at me. They start shooting from all directions. I got a hold of the flower and started running. Can you imagine what would have hurt him if I would just leisurely got to the fence and got my flower? What did he think I'm going to do with the flower? I had no knives to cut the wires to run away. This is one experience. Later on that year, in 1944, somebody told me that they think that my little sister Sabina, who was one year younger -- and she was the most beautiful little girl you have ever seen. They said to me -- they asked me my name because I couldn't -- I

didn't remember anybody who was more than I -- the age of mine, and when I got there, the people mine age, I didn't meet them because from my town, if you didn't come on the transport the same day you met with other people -- I was behind, so I don't know if they were taken to the crematorium, the 12-, 13-year-olds. But I didn't meet anybody my age. But this woman must have been in the 20, and she must have known me. And she said, "Are you Jadzia Sklarz?" And I said, "Yes." She said, "I think that your little sister, I'm sorry to tell you, was burned, and she is in the hospital. If you run, you could still see her." I said, "Are you sure?" She said, "Yes. Go there." And I went. I went to this hospital, and I go from bed to bed, and I call out the name. I said, "Sabina, Sabina," and she lifts her head. And I see my little sister. The skin is all off her skin -- her legs, and I asked her what was happen -- what did happen to her. And she said she was appointed to lift the big pot of tea -- in the morning, you were given a bit of tea -- and she got burned. And she says, she saved -- she was hoping that I can find her because she got a piece of ration bread. She wants to give it to me, and I brought mine to her. And we embraced, and I told -- and I asked her what happened to Mama and the other three children -- the other four children. And she said they separated Mother from Father, and Jacob went with my father, and the other, the other two or three -- I don't remember -- which made up five children, she said they went with my mother, but my mother made me run to the good side, so I'm here. And I said, "But what good is it?" I said to myself. I said, "You know something? I'm not leaving you. Wherever you go, I go." And we cried, and we were in such a tight embrace, and I didn't want to leave her, and she didn't want to leave me, and she kept talking to me and telling me that all Mama was thinking is about me, if I ever got here or whatever happened to me. And now she said for me to go back and not cry. Mind you, she was a year younger. And that was April 25th, because I still light a candle for her. And we were in such embrace, I made up my mind, I'm going with her, wherever she goes, and here comes in this Nazi and sees me

standing on the edge of the bed, reaching out to her -- she was on the third layer, on the top -- and hits me over the head and grabs me by my prison dress. They only want you to die when they want you to die. What would have hurt him if I would have gone with her? I was willing because life already, by that time, '44, was meaningless. I, myself, start losing hope. But he tore me away from her, and I could hear her say, "Good-bye. Don't cry." And that was the experience I had meeting a member of my family.

>> Interviewer: And so the two of you were there in the same prison camp.

>> Stern: I saw her just for 15 minutes.

>> Interviewer: For just a very brief time.

>> Stern: Short time.

>> Interviewer: Wow.

>> Stern: I just couldn't take the seeing her. I saw where she was going, where they loaded her. I was standing outside a ways so the Nazis couldn't see me, hidden behind our barrack that was nearby. I never slept that night. That was the saddest moment. I still dream about her.

>> Interviewer: Did she tell you anything more about what she had been through at that point?

>> Stern: Well, since she was in Auschwitz in the same camp, she said she went through the same what -- thing I did. She worked in the fields. She was sorry that we couldn't find each other earlier. And you know, people think, and I say, "Well, maybe if Mother wouldn't have hidden me, maybe I would have gone -- been with her." But who can predict? So nobody from my family survived. Of my whole family, only three people. And my sister who is Israel, she couldn't possibly live no place else. She said, "Europe was so torn with prejudice." When she asked me if I wanted to go with her, and -- she sees no reason for her to

stay in Europe. She would never be comfortable. But she had a sad life, too, because life in Israel was hard for her. She has lost a grandson in the uprising. She has lost a brother -- a son-in-law. She has a daughter. And she had a little baby before she went to the concentration camp because that was her second marriage. She was married.

>> Interviewer: Yes.

>> Stern: And it's another sad story, the way they took her baby in her arms and killed in front of her.

>> Interviewer: Oh, Jadzia.

>> Stern: So what can I tell you? It is very traumatic for me.

>> Interviewer: I know. Tell me about the liberation.

>> Stern: Yeah, I will, but let me tell you, Auschwitz was the harshest, most worst camp. Four million people were murdered there and gassed.

>> Interviewer: In that one camp.

>> Stern: In that one camp. So you can see the smoke every day. We had to see. Sometime you would see red. The skies were red, and the smoke was red too. You know, when I was younger, I wasn't willingly -- always so willing to tell my story. I live here over 40 years. I came to this country in 1949, four years after liberation. And naturally, people, having an accent and having a number on their arm, ask me what it was. I wouldn't talk about it. First, people didn't understand what I was saying. You're an intelligent lady. And I told you the best I could, and I have learned, even before I could speak English, no matter how poorly you -- vocabulary is, you must say in plain words what happened. So I used to tell them, "I was in a death camp. Because I was Jewish, I was discriminated. They picked on the Jews because of the religion." And I said, "But he killed also other people." Hitler was a, a tyrant. He also killed the

Gypsies, people who object his policy. He probably killed his own people who objected to what he was doing, but not many, German. I wouldn't say it would go into millions. He also killed preachers who stood up what was right and decent. He killed senior citizens. He didn't want them. He also killed the sick, the handicapped, and the retarded. So you can imagine what a world we lived in the '30s and the '40s.

>> Interviewer: It is almost beyond my comprehension.

>> Stern: What I wanted to know when I came to this country -- but let me answer your question about my liberation. By that time, in 1944, they made us walk. They called it a Dead Walk. It was during Christmastime. First, we were put on open train wagons that we could see the planes and the bombing. And then we went down, and we walked miles, from one camp to another. I don't remember all the camps I was in. But I was liberated in 1949 by the Russians in Leipzig.

>> Interviewer: In 19 --

>> Stern: 1945.

>> Interviewer: 1945.

>> Stern: 1945 in May, the first week of May, by the Russians. And some of them were not very kind. I told Rose [phonetic] about it. I'm skeptical to say it, but I might as well tell it the way it was. There were two beautiful twins that I was in the camp with. I don't remember too much about the liberation. Evidently, by that time, we slept in the fields on snow with frozen feet. I must have been 70, 80 --

01:05:23