

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Lilly Malnik

May 10, 1990

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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Lilly Malnik, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on May 10, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview cannot be used for sale in the Museum Shop. The interview cannot be used by a third party for creation of a work for commercial sale.

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LILLY MALNIK
May 10, 1990

01:00:11

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: Would you tell us your name, and where and when you were born?

A: Yes. My name is Lilly Applebaum Lublin, Malnik by marriage. And I was born in Antwerpen [**Eng:** Antwerp], Belgium, in 1928. And um, I had a good, happy life as a child; and my grandmother in Antwerpen raised me. And um...in 1939, she got very, very sick. And I remember as a young child, when we were...they were talking about Hitler making it very, very hard for the German Jews in Germany. I remember my grandmother always saying [that] if there would be another war, she would would like to die first; because she doesn't want to live through another pogrom, in Poland. My grandmother came from Poland. And sure enough, in 1939 my grandmother got sick. And she died of cancer. And...

Q: Would you... Before you go on with the story of the war, tell us a little more about your childhood. What was the community like? What was your schooling like?

A: We um...we lived in a very Jewish neighborhood in Antwerpen. As I said, my grandmother took care of me. She was a very religious woman. And so she lived in a Jewish neighborhood. And I had lots of little friends. And um...we played. I remember playing in the streets in our neighborhood; and...and there was a very Jewish comm...um, um community there, with shuls and everything. And everything was open and free, and I was very very happy there. And um...it was beautiful.

01:02:23

Q: Did you go to school?

A: And I went to school in kinder... I remember going to kindergarten, and then into the elementary school. And then when um my grandmother got sick, my...and died...my mother had to come and get me from Brussels. Um, my mother took care of my brother and my sister, who were older of...of me, in Brussels. Being that my father was here in America--he came here before the war--um, my mother had a hard time raising the three children. So I was split up; and my grandma took care of me, being that I was the youngest. And my mother took care of my brother and my sister in Brussels. There in Brussels, my mother had um an apartment. Uh, we lived right in the heart of Brussels. And um my mother had a atelier, which means like a working...a workshop. And um she made raincoats. Um, in Belgium it rains a lot; and um a lot of people used to make raincoats there. And we made it from scratch, from... And um we sewed and we glued;

and they made raincoats. And that's how she made a living. And um when I came there in 1939, um I was a year with my mother. When one morning in 1940, I woke up early in the morning hearing um noises and didn't know what it was.

01:04:04

And I heard: pouff. Um, like explosions. And um we went to the window and we looked up in the sky, and there I saw white um clouds--like puffs, like snowballs. And um I realized it was like from um cannon balls. Or whatever, I don't know. We ran down the street; and people came down and we were all in the streets. And we found out that the um Germans were invading um Belgium.

01:04:40

And um it was early spring. In May. And um mid-afternoon, the Germans walked down, in parade, into the main street of Brussels. And this is how they came in and invaded Belgium. And that's when our troubles started, with the Jewish people in Brussels. They started very slowly with the Jewish people. Because they were afraid um to start very hard on us, because they were afraid of rebellion. They did not know how the reaction would be from the Belgian people. So they started the curfew, and with um yellow patch--we had to wear the yellow patch, which meant...which said "Jude." And we had um to give ...um all information about ourselves we had to give them. And um we had to give up um our um... I don't know if we had to give up our passports or not; but um I knew there was...I know that there was curfew. And um they started asking for volunteer jobs. People should volunteer, and give um um for jobs to go to um Germany to work. And a lot of people thought that if they would um go and volunteer, that they um would be safe. So a lot of people volunteered and went away, and we never heard about them again. So the people were scared. After that, when they saw they didn't get any volunteers, they started raiding sections of um neighborhoods. And this was um in 1942. At that time, I was very very lucky; because um I developed... I...I was a little girl who always suffered of tonsillitis, and being the condition of...um the situation the way it was, my mother was afraid if anything should happen to me that um I would get very sick, and I would... Um, God knows what would happen. She says, "Lilly needs her tonsils out." So she put me in the hospital to take my tonsils out.

01:07:12

And um in the meantime, she had made arrangements with a lady who worked in mother's um atelier--in her shop--that she knew. She was a Belgian lady. She worked for my mother many, many years. And um she said she was going to help my sister, Marja, find a place to hide. Because the Germans were getting very um um--how should I say? They tried to pick up people in the streets, and um and they were already um grabbing people everywhere to put them into transports and send them away. So my mother wanted to um save my sister; and this lady said, um, "I will help find a place for her."

And sure enough, one day she came and she says, "I have an address where Marja can go and hide. It is out in the country. And this man is a farmer, and he will keep Marja until after the war." So my mother was very grateful. She made um a suitcase ready for her, and sent her off to that farm with this woman. And while I was in the hospital, one day my mother came to visit me. And I could see that she had been crying, and she was very sad. I says, "Ma, what's the matter? Why are you crying?" So she broke down, and she told me that Marja had been taken. I says, "How come?" I said, um, "You put her away to be hiding in...in...in a farm." She says, "The man denounced her." "How did he... Why?," I asked. And um later, I found out as I got older from my family, he tried to um force my sister they should have relationships with her. And my sister was young, and...and she said, "No. I'd rather go to the Germans." She said, "I'm...I'm...I'm not going to have any of that. And um I...I will not let you do this to me." And he threatened her; and he says, "If you don't," he says, "I'm going to denounce you!" And sure enough, he did denounce her.

01:09:40

And the reason how we know it is because a postal card came to us. When she was um taken out of um to transport from Belgium to um the camp, she had slipped a postal card through...through the cracks of the cattle wagon. And um early in the morning as people were going to work and the farmers were going to work in their fields, they would pick up notes and cards that people dropped from the um wagons. And um this is how we got our card from my sister, saying, "Beware of this woman, because she she took me to this man who wanted to have relationship with me. And I wouldn't give in, and I got denounced." So my mother being very naïve about it; and um she seeked that woman out and made problems for her. And sure enough, that woman denounced my mother and my brother. And how she did it is this way. I had a grandfather, who--in those days, in 1942, they didn't bother with the old people. They wanted the young people. So my mother and my brother, who was left, they um went and took um a furnished room someplace and hid. And they left my grandfather in the apartment where my mother lived originally. But she knew my...my um Zayde--which is my grandfather--had no food, and she worried over him. So she went and cooked him some soup, and she was going to bring it to him to eat. And as she turned around the corner from the street and our apartment building was right at the corner, she saw the Germans waiting there for her. This woman knew that my mother was bringing soup to my [grand]father; and um my mother was caught right there and then. My...my mother and my brother ran across the street into a grocery store. And the Germans came after her in that little store, and they took her away.

01:12:10

The reason I know about this is because--um I have to go back a little bit. When um I came out of the hospital, I had an aunt who was hiding out in the country. She said to my mother, "Bring Lilly to me, so she can recuperate from her tonsil um operation. And let her stay with me a few days." So while I was recuperating and staying with my mother--

um, with my aunt--excuse me--a...a call came to us from neighbors from our street. From gentile people. And told my aunt, "Do not bring Lilly back to this address, because her mother and brother were just taken away." And this is how I stayed with my aunt and my uncle, and in hiding in, out in the country. Which is the outskirts of Brussels. And um um...and I was hiding there until 1944. In the meantime, the rest of my family were taken. Little by little, they picked them up; and they were all caught. Except this aunt of mine who kept me, and another aunt. Another aunt, she had two little girls and she gave them to um um...not an orphanage...

Q: A convent?

A: ...um, a convent. And um the convent kept them for a little bit. Then they got very very nervous about it; and they called my aunt, and um my aunt had to place the children someplace else. So she finally hired a lady who was willing to um take care of those two children while my aunt was um doing housework for gentile people and pretending she was Christian. She would do housework, and she would pay that lady every month. And she kept those two children. And um so I was in hiding with my other aunt. And in order to survive--because the money was running out a little bit--and um...and to make ends meet, the people who um we lived with in our apartment building um knew that I was Jewish. And um they said, "Lilly, let's call you Lilliane from now on." They were very, very nice to me. And they liked me very much, and they helped me as much as they could. And um and life was really not that bad while I was in hiding with my aunt and uncle.

01:15:02

There was a little factory right next to us. And um when the Germans um came into Brussels and raided us, they um took over that factory and they started making camouflage for the army. So this man um knew that I was hiding. And he says, "Lilly, come in and work for me. Nobody will know that you are Jewish. And whatever you make will help you to buy groceries." And so I did this. And um...so one day--I'll never forget--one day, um the owner of these people said, um, "Lilly, I'm entertaining um German people tonight for dinner. And they're big to-do people, and I would like you to come and do um the dishes and help us in the kitchen. You won't have to come in the living room, but you'll be just in the kitchen." In the meantime, while I was doing the work during the day in that little factory, I also was doing part-time um...I was doing manicuring in a beauty shop up the street. And I was making tips. And all this helped me in that I could give that money to my aunt and my uncle for food. So I learned to make manicuring. And so I um couldn't say no to the people, because I was grateful that they were giving me the job. But I says, "I'm Jewish. I'm scared to be near them." He says, "Lilly, I assure you that nothing will happen to you. I will not tell the Germans that um you are there, that you... I'll just say that you're a little girl helping me." So I did. And um while I was doing the dishes and after dessert time, the owner comes into the kitchen and he says, "Lilly, I have a request." I says, "What is it?" He says, "I told them that you are

an apprentice in um...in a beauty shop, and that you do manicuring. And one of the officers wants you should do him...give him a manicure." Well, I almost died from fright. I says, "How can I?" He says, "You pretend that you're...you don't have to speak to them. Just give them a manicure, and you get out." So I um...I was there, I couldn't say no. And believe it or not, I sat down and I gave this German a manicure. How I didn't cut his fingers, I don't know. But I'll never forget that. How I said to myself, "You should only know that a Jewish girl is giving him a manicure!" And he was so happy, and he so was...that I gave him his manicure that he even gave me a tip. But this is just a sideline of a little story of what went on in my life, that I want to bring that out.

01:18:14

As the the years...in...in 1940...from 1942 to '44, at the end it was getting real tough on us. And um as we were struggling to survive, one day I came home from work and the people downstairs told us that we have to get out. Why? There was a new tenant that moved in and found out that we were Jewish. And they were going to denounce us. And they said they know that the Germans are going to come and pick us up at night. So my aunt and my uncle had to leave. And the owners from the um factory said, "Lilly, you are going to stay with me until your aunt and uncle find a place." So that night, I went and I stayed with them. It so happens that their apartment was next door to us. Their side of the wall was our side of the wall from our apartment. And that night, sure enough, the Germans came with the trucks and came into our apartment. And they were so angry to...not to find us there. They threw furniture. They opened drawers. I heard them scream and I heard them knock; and I heard the apartment, the wall was shaking from um...from the noises and the...the things they were throwing around in the apartment. And I was shaking in bed. And I was laying there; and um the owner jumped to look out the window. The woman laid next to me, and she held my hand. And she kept saying to me, "Lilly, please... Lilly, pray to your God that they don't find us. Pray to your God that they don't find us; because they're going to kill us, shoot us, and they'll take you away." And she kept screaming at her husband to get away from the window. "They'll see you, and they'll come here." But sure enough, nobody told them where I was. Nobody from the um apartment. And um they took off. And they um put a seal on the apartment door, so that we should not come in. Because they were going to confiscate whatever there was in the apartment.

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I did not know where to go. One of the girls that I acquainted while I was working there in the factory liked me very much. A Belgian girl. And she said to me, "Lilly, you come and stay with me. While your aunt and uncle will stay in an apartment wherever they will live, but you'll stay with me. And nobody will ever know that you are Jewish." And my aunt was so happy that um this girl had um offered for me to stay that she let me do it. Well, after um two weeks I was so worried about my aunt and uncle. I didn't know how they were coming along. One Sunday morning, I decided to um um go and visit them. So

I took the streetcars, and I went in to their neighborhood where they were hiding. And they had a small two bedroom--um, two room um little um um apartment. It was just two little rooms--a kitchen and a bedroom. And I stayed with them, and I had dinner. And um I wanted to go back to the girl's house. And my uncle said, "No, Lilly, stay over and sleep. Because it's getting late. I don't want you to go through that section where you...um where we live here, because the um the men are just sitting out in the streets and drinking beer. And I don't want you to walk through them." Because it was like um a low-graded neighborhood where they were hiding in, and he was afraid for me to walk there by myself. And it was getting dark. My aunt encouraged me to go; and she was arguing with my uncle. And my uncle said, "No, I don't want her to go." Finally my aunt let in, and... "Where is she going to sleep?" "She is...I'm going to make a bed for her on the floor near the kitchen door. She'll sleep there on the floor." Sure enough, I deci...they decided I should sleep there. So I went to sleep. And early in the morning, I heard this terrible banging at my door, on...at the head of my door. And I jumped up, and I looked out of the window. And there were the Germans standing with the um rifles up high like this, shooting in case somebody wants to jump out of a window.

01:23:08

And I had to open up the door, and there they came in. And they took us away with a...with a truck. And they put us in a jail, where they gathered us together with people. We were crammed into a small little jail. I don't know how many people were there. We couldn't breath. We hardly could breath. We couldn't go to the bathroom. It was just terrible. We heard screams from other cells. And finally, by dawn, they took us with another truck and they brought us to another place called Malines, which is a small town between Brussels and Antwerpen.¹ Malines is a place that used to be a caserne [**Trans:** "barracks"]. A caserne is like um um...an army place, where um they--an armory. Years ago they used to have horses there, I found out. The reason I found out is because five years ago, for the first time, I went back with my husband to Belgium. And I...and I found out about that. And um...and they made a jail...um they made a um um--how should I say? A...a camp for...a place for to keep all the people they gathered together from Belgium, from Brussels. And when they had enough of a transport, they transported us from there to the camps. And so we were kept in that place, in Malines. Maybe I was there about six weeks. We were sleeping on straw um pads, bags like that. And um...and we had rationed food. And um...and we were...we weren't doing anything. Every once in a while, even there when a transport would come in, I would hear screams and carrying on from they were torturing people next door for them to find information. But um until they had enough people--maybe about three, four hundred people, the most five, I think--they made a transport and they sended us off. And that was in 1944, when I was deported

¹ Also: Mechelen (Flemish), or Mechlin (English). This was a police detention camp (Polizeihaftlager) used as a transit camp (Durchgangslager) for Jews between August 1942 and July 1944.

out of Brussels--I mean, Malines. And what I found out afterwards, that I was the second um last transport. I was the twenty-fifth transport that left Malines. And after that, there was one more transport; and then Belgium was liberated.²

01:26:01

When I was um...when I went into the transport, they gave us bread; and the younger children received a can of milk. I remember my aunt would not let me drink the milk, in case I needed it for later. And she just let me have a little piece of bread. We were pushed in the cattle cars. And our cattle car happened to be a coal cattle car. So in no time, we were black and dirty. And we were pushed in like sardines into that cattle cars, with buckets for to um...do our urine in and um bowel movement. And it was just horrible. There was a small little window with barbed wire over it, and we had no air except what came from that little window. And we travelled like this, I think...I think, for three or four days. I have no idea. And sometimes they would stop in between sirens, and...and we would just sit there. We were all cramped. And people would um lose control of themselves; and we laid in that dirt. It was just horrible. And one time there was such a commotion, because people became so tired and exhausted and lost of their patience. They started to um get angry at one another, and people started screaming. So all of a sudden, one German... They...because they were um guarding the um cattle cars from the outside for people who escaped. So um he took his rifle and he shot a bare blank; he shot at two people, and he screamed to be quiet. So we...we thought we were going to die right there and then. And this is how we arrived finally in Birkenau.

01:28:07

A camp called Birkenau. And it was like dawn. And I saw lights, and um we saw fire from far away. And um like a chimney, with fire going. And um we thought they were factories. And I said, "Good." I says, "We will be able to work." And I see um little...saw barracks with lights burning; so I said, "Oh, maybe now I'll be at peace at least." They told us to leave our luggage. And whatever our packages we had with us, we had to leave at um on the ground. And we had to go and stay in line as we came off the um cattle cars. And they separated the men from the women. As they separated us, I didn't even have time to say goodbye to my uncle. And um...and my aunt and I were standing, one next to each other. And as we came close to um... One by one, to...in front of the Germans, one tall fellow--I didn't know who he was--which later I found out was Mengele, Dr. Mengele. He guided us to go to the right or to the left. And at that time I did not know what that meant. And he told me to go to the right, and he told my aunt to go to the left. I thought my aunt was going to the left to give information about our names and birth, and...and that I would see her later, and to give our passports away. But I never saw her

² The last transport of Jews apparently left Malines on July 31, 1944. Belgium was liberated at the beginning of September 1944.

after that again. Because I...once I came into the camp, I found out from the inmates what the left meant. The left meant crematoire [NB: crematorium], which meant the ovens that I saw burning. Instead of factories, they were ovens. And they were gassing and burning the people what went to the left. I don't have to say how I felt. I thought it was the end of of us all then. I was fifteen years old, and I was all alone in this Hell.

01:30:36

They told us when we came in, they told us to undress and that we were going to be showered and that they were going to give us clothes. The place was so cold. It...it...it was in early winter; and um it...in Birkenau, this...which is Poland, it was freezing cold. We stayed there for hours to um to wait for our clothes. They um took our clothes away, and they gave us inmate clothes. And it was paper thin. And no towels to dry; and um for hours they let us stay there. And people were crying and carrying on. We had no food. We were starving hungry. And finally they gave us the clothes, and then they put us in barracks. They put us in barracks; and we were packed like sardines. The barracks were um...the beds were bunks, three layers. I was on the top layer. And we were like sardines packed. I think there were...we were um about fourteen people, if I'm not mistaken. If one person wanted to turn, we all had to turn. So that we could move around. And at early dawn, they um ...they whistled, and we had to get up and stay in "Appell." "Appell" means like roll call. And for hours we stayed in "Appell." And it was freezing cold. And the...and it was mud. The roads were out of gravel and mud. And our feet were ice cold. And um the next day, they came after roll call; and they called us back to the same place where they um...where we had showered and um ga...they gave us the clothes. And they tattooed me. They tattooed me; and they told us from now on, this is my name. My name is A-5143. This was the second time. The first time, they made a mistake with the whole transport. So they called us back and they scratched the first number out, and then they gave us the second number. And they said, "From now on, you do not answer by your name. Your name is your number."

01:33:26

And the delusion, the disappointment, the discouragement that I felt. I felt like I was not a human person anymore. They had shaved our heads; and I felt so ashamed. And also when they told us to undress and to shower, they made us feel like...like we were animals. The men were walking around, and laughing and looking at us. And you take a young girl at that age, who was never been exposed to um a person...to a man, and you stay there naked... I wanted the ground should open, (crying) and I should go in it. (Pause - crying) It took me many many years for me to get over this. My husband always wondered why I would go into the bathroom and get undressed, and come out in my nightgown. And I never told him why, except recently. It took all these years to tell him why. Because I could never see anybody staring at me while I was naked. And I think that's what it was. Because it is a just...it was just terrible for me, what we had to go through at that age. And I didn't understand why. All because I was Jewish. And I used to

say to myself, "What did I do to deserve this, to be here for the Germans to do this to me? What did we do to them?" The answers were never an...the questions were never answered. And I had to make the best out of everything. Try to survive in that jungle.

01:35:43

They gave me, finally, little rations of hard, dried-up bread which was half mildew. I could hardly eat it. And a tin can of soup; which was so rotten and vile, when I tasted it I couldn't eat it. I put it down, and I didn't eat it. I just ate the bread and drank a little water, which was just rust running out from the um sink that they had over there. We couldn't wash ourselves. We had no soap. We had only that dirty water that ran out from that um sink hole where they had over there. And finally when I got so hungry and I knew I had to eat the soup, I couldn't eat it. It was so vile. It was so terrible. I never ate anything like that in my whole life. I said, "If I want to survive, if I want to go back to my aunt, ..." Because I knew I still had one aunt in Belgium. "...I have to eat the soup." So I started eating the soup. And I re...I remember forcing the soup down my throat, and big tears coming down my face. Eating and crying, eating and crying. And this is how I was in Birkenau for six weeks. Then, word came around; and we said, "We have to work. If we don't work, they're going to take us to the gas chamber." So anytime there was work for volunteers, we volunteered.

01:37:29

We stood up. The young girls, we all stood together as a group. That the girls came out of Belgium. We had made a pact that we should stick together, because all the parents was taken together in the gas chambers. So they said, "Let us stick together, and let's try and survive." So one day...we were doing over there very hard labor work. We were doing roads. Or they told us to pick up rocks and...and...and carry them from one hill to the other hill. What we accomplished, I really don't know. They just wanted us to do something. And they were going with the um whips and hitting us, while we were doing that. In the cold. One day...we were always looking for other jobs, because that would kill us if we would do this everyday. So one day they came, and they volun...and they said, "There is a new camp opening up. And we need volunteers to work in the kitchen." And we grabbed that opportunity. And there was about um twenty-five, thirty girls. And um we were lucky enough to be taken to take that job. So they took us. And we showered, and they gave us new clothes. And we went to work into the kitchen. And we found out that that was in Auschwitz.

01:39:05

Auschwitz is maybe like um a mile, a mile and a half, away from Birkenau. And the camp I was in was called 2-B Lag...um Lager. Zwei-B Lager. And that was a new lager that they had opened up there. And we started working in the kitchen. Well, the work was so hard. It was even harder than the other work. Because we had to get up before the

camp um got um woken up, so that um we should make the coffee ready. And cut the bread, the um um the rations. And prepare the soup. So we worked very very hard, dragging these heavy things. And I was a young girl, I had no food. And I had to drag those heavy um cans of um soup and coffee liquids out. And um...like in the army. And it was only two people per...per barrel, whatever they called it. We had to carry it all the way out from the kitchen to the outside, so that the inmates could come and pick it up. And I cried myself to sleep because of the hard work. And over there, that's the way I was for six months. In Auschwitz. In the meantime, while life was going on over there, it was very very rough for all of us. We were trying to survive.

01:40:47

Transports were coming in every day, from all different countries. People with all kinds of different languages--Hungarian, Poles, Czechoslovakians, from Holland, from France, from Belgium, from Germany... They were from ever...Italy... There were eve...Poles, Russians... They were from everywhere. It was a melting pot. And everybody spoke in different languages. And one day--I'll never forget--a whole transport of Hungarian people came in. Women and children. And...into the camp... I was surprised--even children; because um they only had adult people there. And then I found out that these...that transport, that Hungarian transport--it was two...two um barracks that they filled up with--that they were going to the gas chamber. And they had no food. So I took a bucket of boiled potatoes, and... At night, I had made up my mind to do this. And I was going to sneak into one of the barracks, and give as much as I can to each person. I would give them a bowl of potato. Because we cooked always one day ahead, and we um made um...to make the soup. So that's how I was able to take um a bucket of boiled potatoes. Well, in the beginning it went nice and quietly. But then as people find out they were getting...somebody was giving them food, I...I come...made a whole um commotion with all this. And all of a sudden the lights turned on, and the blockälteste--which is the um the lady in charge of that barracks--op...opened up the lights and saw me. And um she saw what I was doing; and she says, "You know, I could denounce you where you could be shot right there. And then what you're doing?" She says, "Give me that bucket, and get back to your barrack where you belong!"

01:43:05

And um the next day they were all liquidated, all these people. They were all gone. And I could have lost my life. I didn't realize what I was doing. But I felt in my heart that I wanted to help these people, and this is all I could do. And one day I had to take out the coffee early in the morning. It was my mine um time to take out the coffee. And I took a woman who um...from...from the camp who was going to help me; and she was inexperienced. There was a um way to um carry it in order not to spill it. You ...you pick up something heavy, you...you... I was told you pick it up, and you go straight with it. If you bend and you...then you have the whole weight of the um...of the um...of the um can, and it weights you down. But if you go straight, then you carry it with your whole body.

So you can walk with it straighter. So this poor woman was a weak person. She didn't know how to carry it, and she was wobbling back and forth. And this was boiling coffee. And she finally dropped it on me, and then she took off and ran; and I got burned. I got burned on my leg, and um was severely burned on my left foot. And they took me to the infirmary. The infirmary was all the way in the end of the camp. Nobody ever wanted to go to the infirmary; because, first of all, there was no medication there anyhow. But in...people who were almost really dying would go to the infirmary; and from there, they carried them out to be burned. Not only that, they would take out um people and...and...and to be gassed. But I went there to have just my bandage changed; because where the um big um can fell on my foot, it scraped all the skin off. And um so I needed bandages on...on my foot. So as I was being waiting for my um turn to um change the bandage, all of a sudden a jeep stopped and in came Dr. Mengele.

01:45:44

And I saw death in front of my eyes. And he wanted to know what I was doing there. So I said to him right away, "I am working. And I'm working in the kitchen, and I had an accident." And I told him what happened. "And I'm just waiting to have my um bandage exchanged." And he said, "OK." And he let me exchange my bandage; and I went right out and I had two girls helping me walk back to the camp, to the kitchen. And as I was walking back with the two girls, I was putting my heel down into the ground and I was hopping that way back. But being that the pavement was always full of mud...there was no dry pavement. We were always in mud up in to our ankles. All of a sudden, I heard the brakes. And I looked behind, and there is the jeep with Dr. Mengele and two guards right next to him. He always had two guards, just in case somebody wants to kill him I presume. So he had two guards with their rifles; and he had a sho...a revolver in his waist. So the um driver stopped, and he started screaming at me in German--how dare I jump...how dare I walk with my heel on...on...with my bad foot in the mud when my bandage has just been changed. He said, "What do you think we do here, exchange bandages for you so that you can make them muddy? Jump on one leg, or else!," he said. Well, I started jumping on that one foot. And if it wouldn't have been for those two girls who were holding me, I would have collapsed. And I thought any moment he was going to shoot me or tell me to get on the jeep. I thought he was going to put...take me away. And how I walked into that kitchen, I'll never know. We were all three of us exhausted. He followed me and trailed slowly behind me; to make sure that I was going into the kitchen for one, and also that I jumped on one leg. And that's how I...he took off, I know it. And that's how I escaped his death claws. I'll never forget that, with this Dr. Mengele. And finally it healed up. I still have a scar in my leg.

01:48:19

And um every day was um a struggle to survive. Every day, I woke up and I would find one or two people who wanted to end their lives and couldn't take it anymore. They would throw themselves to the electric wires and make a end of it, because the electric

wires would electrocute them. And every once in a blue moon, I wouldn't...I couldn't take it any more. I would try to sneak out of the barracks at late at night, when we were not supposed to be; because we could have been shot right there if a German would see us at night out in out of the barracks. But I would sneak behind the barracks and I would go all the way in the back. And I would try and look at the sky. And I would see the sky...I would see the stars. And I would talk to myself; and I would say, "I can't believe that these stars are looking down at us in this Hell, in this camp, and the same stars are shining at the outside of the world. And other people are looking at the same stars, and they are free. And they are free to do what they want to do. And they are living a good life. And we are here in Hell--human beings worse than animals. And nobody is doing anything about it." And I couldn't believe it, and I would say...and I would... As young as I was, I...I was asking myself these questions. And I would say, "Where is the world? Why isn't the world doing anything about this?" And then I would question God; and I would say, "Where is God? How can he let us being killed like that?" Naturally, I had no answer. And after I cried myself out real good, I would go back to the barracks.

01:50:23

And face the morning, and stay in "Appell" for hours again in the cold, and then go to work in the kitchen. Finally, one day, one morning, I heard that Belgium was liberated. Somehow, somehow--I don't know how it came, um maybe from the underground--but the news came to me that Belgium was liberated. And I was still in Auschwitz. And I was so happy; and I had such terrible mixed emotions, because I was happy. I said, "My aunt is liberated. My Aunt Sarah did not get caught." It never dawned on me that she could have been caught and gone into another camp. I never...never even thought of that. But in my mind, she was liberated; and in another way, I was so sad that I was still in camp and I was still here. And then one morning again, world...word came to us that we were going to evacuate Auschwitz. Why were we evacuating Auschwitz? It is because the Russians were coming close by. And so we...we all walked out of Auschwitz, and we started walking.

01:51:56

And we started walking, we walked for days. I'll never forget it. I don't know how many days we walked. We walked, and then we took cattle cars, and then we walked again. And as we walked, we heard gunshots. And they told us to keep on marching. We heard gunshots; and they were shooting people in the back who couldn't keep up with the walking. It ended up being called the "death march," because the ravines and the...and the gutters, they were all red from blood. From people... Some people who spoke Polish--we were walking through Poland, and some people who thought they could escape would try and escape. Some people who couldn't keep up with the walking anymore--they got weak, they threw all their bundles away, and they walked until they couldn't keep up anymore. They fell behind, and the Germans just shot them. We saw people being shot in the front, in their chest, in the back. They were laying all over: on top of hills, behind

trees... It was really like a war zone. And this is how we finally arrived in a camp called Bergen-Belsen.

01:53:15

Bergen-Belsen were...was just the opposite of a camp from Auschwitz. In Auschwitz, at least there we worked. And every once in a blue moon, we...we went into the showers. As much as we were afraid to go to the showers, because we didn't know if the showers would give us water or gas; but we showered once in a blue moon. Over there [NB: Bergen-Belsen], we had no showers. We had no toilets. In Auschwitz, we had a barrack which was nothing but a toilet. One long toilet. How was the toilet made? The toilet was um a plank with two holes. One opposite the other. Two rows. And people would have to use those...those um um holes to...to do their business. And one person would walk right in the middle of those...those holes with a whip in their hand. God forbid if you missed the hole. They would hit us. And when we came into Bergen-Belsen and I was looking for the toilet barracks, there was none. So I found out that they had made a ditch, and we had to go in the ditch and do it. The decay and the filth in Bergen-Belsen was undescrivable. The conditions, the food... We had no...um my barrack had no...no um um...not bunks to sleep on.

01:55:24

They gave us straw mats. We slept on straw mats. After a month, the straw mats got rotten, and we had to throw them away. So I slept on the bare floor. I had nothing to sleep on. The little girl that I was with, that was the only one that I was able to um um keep with on the death march, her name was Christiane. And I ...I stuck with her. She was the only girl from...she was from France, and I was from Belgium. But we both spoke French, so we ...we...we stayed together. She was a year younger than I am. She never knew why she came into the camp. She didn't even know she was Jewish. I don't even know how she was caught. And she was a very young, naïve little girl; and I kind of protected her, as young as I was. She...I had promised the other girls that I was going to take care of her, because we were separated from the other group, from the other Belgian people. So I felt like a duty, that she was part of me; and I kind of protected her. And um I guess that gave me the strength to carry on, because I kind of worried about her. And the life in Bergen-Belsen was just terrible. We had...the...the rations were the same. And the people just died like flies over there, because there was nothing. We had...we had no work over there. We just sat around. And we walked around--in the decay, in the dirt, between the...the um um ditches from the bathrooms. The smell was horrible; and...and people were...got sick. People got diphtheria, the runs; and it was terrible catching. And um finally, the little girl got sick. I...you would go and stay in front of kitchens, hoping that somebody would see me that knew me from Auschwitz, maybe. I was hoping would give me something. And finally, um twice some people gave me--one time a little bit of coffee and one time a little bit of soup--that I ran back to Christiane to give it to her. And Christiane died in my arms while I was feeding her a little bit of the coffee.

01:57:53

I wanted her to have a little bit of hot um coffee, and she died in my arms. But before she died, she had gotten delirious from the fever. Afterwards, I found out it was typhus that she had. And she got delirious. It was the middle of the night, and she saw her family in her fever. So she started...she got up, and she wanted to run to her family. She cried in French, "Mama!" And she wanted to go to them. And, naturally, she was stepping on the sleeping people, and she made a commotion. So I tried to calm her, and lay her down. And while I was trying to calm her, the Blockälteste--which is the woman in charge of the um barrack-- came down on me with a stick. And she started beating me. She beat me so much, until the the stick broke. And I laid there for two days. I couldn't move. I was so bruised and broken up. And it was right after that that Christiane died.

Q: We'll stop here, and they're going to change tapes.

01:59:17

TAPE #2

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

02:00:10

Q: We're on.

A: So Christiane died in my arms. When Christiane died, I did not let know...I didn't tell the Blockälteste that she was dead. I pretended she was asleep. I put her down and covered her up. And I pretended she was asleep, because I received her ration of bread. And I took that ration and soup, and ate it for two days. And then after that, I was afraid that she would start smelling, and that they would discover and they would hurt me again. So I said to the woman, the Blockälteste, that she had died. When Christiane...when they found out that she was dead, they took Christiane. And they took her out, and they threw her on top of a pile of dead people. I said, I compared the two differences of the two different camps. Auschwitz, they took away the dead people. They gassed them and they burned them; and in the camps we didn't see any dead people. We only saw the um people being hit or being dragged away, but we never saw any dead people laying around. In Bergen-Belsen, was just the opposite. Bergen-Belsen was nothing but dead people. Skeletons. Skin and bones. They piled them up as they died. Every day, five people would be dead from...from one barrack. And they just piled them up, like a mountain, outside in front of the um door of the barrack. And the piles got as high--I would say um six, seven feet. Because I remember when they... First, in the beginning, I couldn't look at her. I was afraid to look at Christiane on top of that pile. I knew where she was. And I knew what she had on. Christiane had a skirt--a little skirt, a thin little skirt--and a navy blue jacket. And finally my guilt couldn't take it any more. I said I had to go and look at Christiane. So I went out, and I looked at Christiane. And one thing puzzled me...and I didn't understand what was wrong. Christiane's skirt was taken away, and she was bare from the waist down. Nothing but bones and skeleton. Just like you see in the...in the pictures, or in the movies they show. And she had a white jacket on. I says, "Why is her jacket white? Why would somebody take off the blue jacket, and put a white jacket?" So I went closer by of the pile...to the um skeletons, the dead people. And I looked up; and underneath that white, I saw the navy blue. And the outside of the white was lice. Big white lice, like the size of black ants that you see sometimes, the black ant crawling in the dirt. That's as big as those lice were. And they covered that navy blue little jacket; and it made the jacket look white or grayish. And it shocked me so that I almost fell on the... under the dead cadavers. And I ran away and I never looked at Christiane again anymore. I was so...it...it...it just took everything out of me. I couldn't take it. They were eating Christiane up, this... From...from...from the terrible--the lice, the decay, the filth. And this is how she ended up, a young fifteen year old girl.

02:04:19

And after that, I was so disillusioned. I had nothing to fight anymore. My morale was so down. And I think I came down with the typhus what Christiane had. And I couldn't work anymore, and I couldn't get up anymore. And I laid there; and one day I had to go to the um bathroom. And I had to go at night. And they...and I fell; and coming back from the bathroom, somebody pushed me and bruised me on my leg. And from the bad nutrition and the bruise developed into a terrible big bruise. And I don't know what happened to my leg, but it was like on fire. And no medication, and no um um medicine. It...it was like um um a fire was on my leg, and a bump; and um I would not let nobody touch it. And I was very weak with the typhus, and I couldn't walk anymore. And I laid there like a skeleton. And this is how I was liberated.

02:05:49

When I was liberated, I couldn't um lift my head up. Finally, after two days, I asked two inmates to pick me up. And I could look out the window and see what a soldier looked like. And then they laid me down again. And then I found out, after the um... probably days, told the um...the um army... They took all these sick people, the ones that were the worst off for um give them immediate help. So one um Red Cross came, and they said they were going to take me away the next day. And so they took off all my clothes that I had on; and they wrapped me in an army blanket, and they took me. And they um took and put me in um a bathing house; and they took the Germans who were the Nazis, they made them put on white uniforms and they took care of our...of the inmates who were very bad off. And they washed me and shampooed me, and um then they put me in a hospital. In the outskirts of Bergen-Belsen, they made um...they set up an emergency hospital. And in that hospital, I remember an Englishman...I could see in his face that my leg was bad. And I had a translator tell me that he was going to do the best to save my leg. And um he operated on me; and um I understand that gangrene had set in the leg from um the um pus, and had reached the bone. Anyhow, I was two months in that hospital fighting for my life. And then, they um...finally after two months and I got some of my strength back, they took me back with the Belgian Red Cross. I remember, one day I saw some soldiers going from bed to bed, from bunk to bunk. And on the lapel, I...I recognized the Belgian flag. I star...I started talking French to them. And they were very excited to find a Belgian girl. And um they made all the inquiries about me, and they um called the Belgian Red Cross. And sure enough, all the information I had given them was correct. So they sent me back to Belgium. Because a lot of inmates after their liberation, they all wanted to get out and wanted to go back to um neutral zones. They didn't want to stay in Russia or Poland. So um they had to check it real closely; and when all the information was correct, they sent me back. Finally, the Belgian Red Cross took me back to um Brussels by um airplane. Ao I traveled back with a army airplane; and I was one of the very very few who were very very injured and weak, and couldn't travel, that was sent back by plane. And when I came back into Belgium, the Belgian um Red Cross asked me where I should go, where...who they could notify. And I didn't know where my aunt was, so I told...I gave the address of the people where I was in hiding. The Belgian people who took care of me. And they came right away and got me. And I stayed there two days,

when word came to my aunt from that lady who had saw my name that um...that I was there.

02:10:01

Q: Can you tell us about that? How...how did your aunt discover where you were?

A: Well, um this very good friend of mine...um...of my mother, knew my aunt. She was a friend of the family. And she saw my name on...on the board. When um the people who survived the camps...um as they came back home, the Belgian Red Cross and the Jewish um society wrote down the names of the survivors. And they listed them. They made posters, and listed them. And as people in the streets, everyday they were running to those um posters to see who...who of their families came back. So that woman saw my name, and knew who I was; and she ran to my um aunt to tell that Lilly survived. And the Belgian...um she got in touch with the Belgian Red Cross, and the Belgian Red Cross told them where they had put me. And so this way she knew where I was, where... And they went over there to get me. Also, at that time, that same lady had met this gentleman in the cafe when she went in....

Q: You need to tell this on the tape. You told me before, but we weren't on tape. Tell me the story again about it.

02:11:29

A: OK. This same lady, after the war she um was trying to um make a living. And after the war, a lot of different nationality um um armies was in Brussels. And so a lot of people were dealing in the black market in um...in Brussels, with um the currency. And this woman was um um doing business with currency. And she was walking into a cafe, when she saw this gentleman at the table having coffee. And she sat next to him and started a conversation. And she wanted to find out all about this um gentleman, for some reason or another. And she was a very inquisitive person, and she kept asking him questions. And so she said, um, "What do you do to um make a living?" And he says, "I'm right in the middle of going to America, so I gave up all my businesses. And um me and my two sons, who survived um concentration camp... Um, I have family in um New York, and um they are making papers for me to go to America." Well, this lady wouldn't give up; and she kept asking questions to him. And she said, um, "Well, who is your family?" He says, "I have a sister." "And what is her name?", she said. And he says, "Lublin." And she got all excited, because she said, "My God, Lublin! I know of a girl who just now survived concentration camp. She just came back from Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen. And she is a Lublin. And maybe it is your sister's husband, or a brother of his. Please send a telegram to him saying that there is a daughter that is here who survived." And so he did, and...

02:13:28

Q: Do you want to tell how your father came to be in America?

A: Well, my father came here in 1928. Um, way before the war. He had left my mother in 1928; and my mother was seven months pregnant with...with me. I had a brother and a sister; and my sister was two years old and my brother was one year. And I was supposed to come in the world. My father was married only in the Jewish religion to my mother, so that the um Justice of the Peace never recognized the marriage. And because of that reason, I was an Applebaum--my mother's name--and my sister and my brother were Lublin. And um when um I came to this country, my father had to prove that I was his daughter. And, naturally, he had a hard time. It took a year, but he finally did...was able to arrange it. And um by proof, by showing letters and money that he sent once in a blue moon to...to um Belgium. And um the reason he said he couldn't do it too often is because, he said, there was also a...a Depression here. But anyhow, that's the only um...the only reason that um...the excuse he had why he couldn't help us before. And he also said that um he inquired with the Belgian Red Cross to find out if any of us survive, but he said we were all gone. That um the Germans had all killed us; and I don't know if he ever inqu...um requested about Applebaum. Because I was still under Applebaum. Maybe he requested about Lublin. I never asked him that question. It never even dawned on me. But um anyhow, he came here in 1928; because he was um a cook on the ships. And when the um his ship came into America, he jumped ship and he came and settled in New York. And that's how he got to America.

02:16:01

Q: And this lady in the cafe...?

A: And so this lady in the cafe said, "There is a Ignatz Lublin"--that was my father's name then--"who went to America in 1928, and had a wife here with three children. And one of his daughters just now was liberated. And you must write to your sister and find out if there is any relationship with that man, because um you have to help that girl. She is over...um a aunt of hers from her mother's side." And um I didn't even know about it. And so, when my um...when this man sent a telegram to his sister, they knew right away who um was this man and um wanted to say. And they knew it was my father. And they got in touch right away with my father, which was my um...that...that woman's um husband's brother. My uncle. And he...and... But...in the meantime, my father had changed his name to Israel Lublin. And he had moved to Washington. So he called up Washington and said, "Israel, there is a daughter that survived. And um...and this is the address where she's staying at." And I received a telegram to...um right away from my father. And when I received a telegram, I wasn't even willing to come here then; because my papers were already made to go to Israel. I was going to aliyah. But my aunt who took care of me, and she brought me back to health... And I loved her very much, because she was the only one that I have had that survived. And um I felt a duty to her. And she helped me; and I loved her very much. And she wanted very much for me to go to

America, because her dream as a child was always to go to America. And I said, "I don't want to go to America. I want to go to Israel." And she convinced me. She says, "You don't know Israel. You don't know America. What difference does it make where you start your life? Go to America for me, and help me and bring me down to America when you will be able." And so I felt so bad, I...I said, "OK." And that's how I came to America to be with my father.

02:18:45

And it's funny. There um was a play last winter called "Shayne Maydel." And I found out about that play. I went to see it; and it's almost like my life, that um play. And I went and I spoke for the people who were in the play, and for the...and the audience, one night; because it was parallel just like my story. And um except that the sister who was in that play--and I have um a half-sister here from... from my father and my step-mother, who...she was very very young and didn't understand what I was all about--while this sister in the play wanted to help the new um sister who was the survivor. And with me, it was just opposite. And um my step-mother didn't help me at all when I was young and...and came here, in the beginning. But anyhow, I was just one year with my father. And met...um married um my husband after I met him for three months. And thank God, it's already...yesterday was 42 years that we are married together. And we have three wonderful sons, and three beautiful grandchildren and a fourth coming on the way.

02:20:18

And they know. Um we've talked to them many times, my children, about the Holocaust and what we have gone through. And um I think they understand what makes us tick and what makes us different people, because of what we went through in life. We tried to be as normal as we can be. And I think we are normal. But inside of us, we will never be the same as any other person who has never been in a concentration camp. It isn't possible. Because of what we went through. Because there's not a day that does not go by that we don't think of camp or of death. And of what we had to go through in life, which was then. It was just terrible. How we lived. It was so inhuman. Animals were taken care... better...had better love and care as...than we did. I remember when we...when I came into Auschwitz, it...it...it was such a Hell place. And when it rained, and...and the ashes flew down from the crematoire on us. We were living with death all the time. And the smell, and the odor. It was im...impossible to describe it. And I cannot believe to think that the people in the outside of the camps, who lived around there, who claimed that they didn't know. I cannot believe that they say they didn't know what went on. Because they must. If we smelled it, they smelled it; and if the ashes fell on us, it must have fallen on them, too, when the wind carried it away. And...and...and... and this is in um Hell that we lived in. And each time I hear a siren ring, to this day--even after forty-five years--I still am right back in the war. And each time, when I go into New York and when we drive the car--even if it is for pleasurable things--but before we get into New York and we hit New Jersey, and I see the...the factories with the chimneys, with the fires burning, I'm right

back in the ovens of the crematoire. (Crying) It is always in my heart. It always will be. 'Til I die. This is how we lived, from the death. And the world was quiet. And never said a word. And this is why I am here today to talk about it. To let the world know, for them to know that it should never happen again. That my children and grandchildren and their children should never know from a life like that. And the world should speak up when another Hitler should come, God forbid. Because then it will be doomsday. I hope it never happens again. Because too many people died. Six million for nothing; just because we were Jews. I hope the world will never forget what we went through.

02:23:56

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add?

A: I'd like to say I'm very very grateful to America. As much I didn't want to come here, I am very very grateful. Because America made me feel like a human being again. Because America was wonderful. And I have to say it is the best world... the best country in the world. And it gave us opportunity to be people and human beings again. We worked very very hard in this country. We were young. It's true. We couldn't speak the language when we came, but we learned real fast. As much as we could. We were not lazy, and we built a new family and a new life. And I'm grateful every day. I say thanks. And every day, I cannot believe what happened to me in my life. I will never forget; and always will look with the future and be grateful to America, that America gave me that opportunity to live as a human being again. Thank you very much.

02:25:24

END OF INTERVIEW