Bluma Shapiro (2005)
Interview 2

Interviewers: Kathleen Andersen, Rachel Mirsky, Sam Miller

Rachel Mirsky: Alright, so last time we talked to you, you went into a little bit about the German occupation in your town, so do you want to talk about that for a little bit?

Bluma Shapiro: Certainly. That's what you want to hear. Yes. Well in, as I say again, in 1939 in history there was a pact between the Russians and the Germans to partition Poland. I come from the east part of Poland, the city of Bialystok, so this came under the Russian, at the time when the Soviet Union occupation. So from 1939 to '41, we were occupied by the Russians. Life changed immediately there. First of all, one of my brothers was arrested and sent up to Siberia.

Secondly, the school changed the language. You know, Bialystok was supposed to be under Belorussia. However, they couldn't find any teachers who knew the language, so they changed into Jewish--

RM: Any teachers who knew what language?

BS: Belarusian, the Belarusian language.

RM: Okay, the Belarusian language.

BS: Yes. Nobody knew that language.

RM: Alright.

BS: And so they changed it to Jewish and all the subjects were taught in Jewish, but also had Russian as foreign language so to speak.

RM: Okay.

BS: And it, of course there was a shortage of every, a shortage of everything and people from the western part of Poland were coming as refugees into the eastern part of Poland, so a lot of students have joined our school and were with us, and the school opened up like a dormitory and they lived there. So as youngsters in school, you know, we were very happy about it. New boys. New girls. It was like a country club in school and we started to learn the Russian lang-- , the Russian songs, but you couldn't learn the Russian language because our professor who taught us was a professor in the university, so she kept on talking and talking. Not like in high school--I was in high school at the time--when, you know, the teacher asks questions and he was
constantly talking. We were supposed to take notes. Of course, we took the notes in Polish because we didn't know Russian yet, so between the Russian language and the Polish alphabet, and then, I'll tell you, at the end of the school we were supposed to have an exam in order to have our certificate that we had finished school, so we said, "Mr. Professor," in Russian already, "Mr. Professor." None of them spoke Russian I don't think. So we said, "What is going to be? We don't know the language. How will we pass our exams?"

He says, in Russian it sounds much different. He says, "Children, girls, don't worry. Put yourself on me." You know--

Kathleen Andersen: [laughs]

BS: In Russian it sounds a little different, you know. He says [Russian saying]. "Lay yourself down on me." So, but however it wasn't a big deal. We really didn't know the language, however it wasn't such a big thing that it was harsh to pass the exam. Let's put it this way. So they were tolerant about it, and we were to have a--we would call here a prom ball. This when the war broke, June 21, 1941, and of course we didn't have our prom, and immediately there were bombardment of our city. At the time, one of my youngest brothers was drafted in the Russian army and my sister-in-law had a little baby, so coming from home I went to stay with her so she wouldn't be alone because of the bombardment she wouldn't be afraid. And the Russians were living close in the same court and they were saying, "Citizens, you shouldn't worry. It's nothing. It's just maneuvers. It's nothing."

Well, about a day later, afterwards, my father came and says, "It's not maneuvers. It's war. We already have the victims. The city was bombarded. Part of the city is already in fire, so I want you to come and we'll all stay together." So my sister-in-law, the baby and myself went back to my parents' home. And immediately, of course, when they boxed it in, one week, they came into Bialystok, the Nazis, and of course there was an immediate shortage of everything else, but it was the army first, the so-called Anxers group when the first cavalries of the Nazi army, and immediate, as I say, the shortage of food, so we were so eager to go and work for the army in order to get some food or have a contact with the non-Jewish population so we'd exchange some goods for food. So I went with my sister and sister-in-law. We started to work with the army and the army was tolerable. I mean, they weren't very bad and they gave us food, gave us bread sometimes and all that, and we were-- The work consisted of cleaning mainly, and about, you know, ten days of foods.

After the army left and the Gestapo came and took over. And of course immediately they had directives. The Jews are not allowed to walk in the, on the pavement. They had to walk in the streets. No parks, not allowed to sit in the benches in the parks, and a curfew. Eight o'clock, no Jews were allowed to be in the street. And a bit later, they had the yellow star back and forth.
Anybody caught without it, you'll be shot on the spot and they did. They also organized a Jewish Councils called Juden Rot in order to have a liaison between the Jewish population and the German occupants, and through them all the directives, all the orders came through. It didn't take long and they decided--of course, people were going still out to work. There was no ghetto yet, but we were going, after through the council they announced that all the Jews were to be settled in a certain part of the city, which normally would hold probably ten, 15,000 people, and Bialystok had around 50,000 Jews. All the 50,000 were supposed to be settled in this part of the city. My parents' home, including myself of course, remained in the ghetto, but my sister and my brother were not. So my sister and her family, husband and child, came over also to live with us. The parents of my sister-in-law also had to come and live with us. My oldest brother was living with his in-laws and they exchanged homes. You know, the non-Jews that lived in the ghetto changed homes with them. They went out of the ghetto. The houses belonged to my brother. My brother took over their house and such things happened very often as they exchanged the homes.

The ghetto was built naturally by the Jews. Labor and material was provided by the Jews, and roundups were beginning to take place. The first thing was they took 2,000 Jews and put them in the Jewish synagogue, in the big synagogue, and set it on fire, and there was a non-Jew who was trying to make a hole in the wall in order to, to make it possible for them to escape. He was caught and he, too, was thrown in.

**RM:** A non-Jew.

**BS:** A non-Jew, and he was also thrown into the synagogue and burned. So the synagogue with the 2,000 people went [indistinct words] and in the ghetto, of course. The ghetto was built. It had--this ghetto had two entrances and exits. Now you could not go out by yourself to go to work. You had to go in groups, and the group was always accompanied by a German with a machine gun and German Shepherd dogs who were taught to kill, and many people, of course, wanted to go out and did go out. Some of them didn't return because from a whim from the Germans they were just shooting people for no good reason at all. Coming back to the ghetto, there was outside a German at the entrance and inside was a Jewish militia man, and very often, of course, they were searched at random. Two things that I had witnessed was once that a woman was trying to hide some eggs in her underwear and she was found out. She was beaten and made to drink the eggs. She never got up. Another time, I saw a man took some oil and he wasn't arrested. It was machine oil and he made to drink it. Of course, he didn't get up, either. One time I had taken--we couldn't, our group came back together and I saw three people hanging in front of the council set in the house. It was like in the center of the ghetto and when I inquired what had happened, and they told me that they were working in a plant that was making oil out of sunflower seeds, and they got caught stealing some sunflower seeds and that was the punishment they had gotten.
In the ghetto itself, roundups took place. Jews were taken out of the ghetto never to return. So we had Mondays, Wednesdays, and we had decided it was a little different because they took 2,000 men and they proclaimed that there had to be a ransom, that when the ransom was paid, the men will be freed. Of course the ransom was paid. Anybody who had anything of value brought it to the Jewish Council in order to ransom the men. The ransom was paid. The Jews were killed the same day outside of the city. And while the people were taken out, rounded up, of course there was less and less population, so they had cut off some streets so let's say now we had 15 people to begin with in our [indistinct word] 25 people had come here because the streets were taken off. So it was assigned that--I don't remember exactly, but I think it was assigned two meter for every person, so if you're small, you had to have four people in. And there was tremendous hunger and sickness, and I had to work in a group that was working for a painter's firm. The men were doing the painting and we, the women, were cleaning up, you know, washing the windows, scrubbing the floors and so forth. At one point the foreman, a German, came in and asked us who knew, does somebody know the gothic script. I had taken German in school and I knew the gothic script.

RM: Does someone--what did he ask?

BS: The gothic script. It's an old-fashioned German script.

RM: Okay.

BS: It's a different alphabet, you know.

RM: Uh, hum. Okay.

BS: So I was afraid to volunteer because you never know with the volunteering, but my older sister who worked with me, she said, "What do you have to lose?" She said, "Washing windows. You'll be probably writing some things in an office or something." So she sort of volunteered me and it was a Mr. Berger was his name, in case you want to know it, and he, I went with him to all the places that the firm was painting--next it was the Gestapo, the military and the officers and I prepared the bills. Now I was sitting in an office already, of course with the yellow sign, yellow star back and forth, and my boss was a certain Mr. Hershman who came from [unintelligible] Prussia and he was a real devoted Nazi. It's true that, you know, in order to come to the occupied territories, one had to be a member of the Nazi party, but he was a Nazi party because he believed in it. So I would sit in the office and handing out very often the paints and the brushes to give the men. They were not allowed to come, so through the window I would give it to them, and I was writing, making the bills ready, too. At one point, it was a very heavy can and I just couldn't lift it, so I asked one of the painters to come in and lift, to take out the can. So Mr. Hershman came in at this moment when the man came in and he starts screaming, "How dare
you allow the Jews to come in!" And you know, I was so stupid and ignorant. I said, "Well, Mr. Hershman, I'm Jewish, too," said it enough because it was an incident. And that prolonged.

In the meantime, in the ghetto, as I said, people were taken out and we had two nurses that are sometimes the patient gives, but no needle, not affect the Jews in Bialystok because they considered ourselves productive Jews. Why? Bialystok was a textile center and many of the factories remained within the ghetto, and of course, the Jews were working those, leather factories and textile factories. And people who didn't want to go outside because it was risky. When people were out to working sometimes, didn't return. They stayed and they worked in the factories. They also got a little bit more food while they were working inside. And we heard rumors that something is going on in the, in the, in the western part of Poland, but we didn't pay no attention because it didn't, it didn't occur that Bialystok would be affected by it. However, in November of 1942 some Jews who were living in the little towns and villages surrounding the city smuggled themselves into the ghetto and told us that concentration camps and all the little towns and villages will be made free of Jews. The order was they were being resettled because the front supposedly is coming, but it's not resettlement. It's taking them to annihilation camp. At the time, we didn't know about Auschwitz, but we knew of Treblinka and Majdanek. It was enough. And they said to you some people are building some hiding places. We called it boongas. They know enough to hide themselves when the action, so-called, was taking place. But again, Bialystok Jews didn't pay too much attention to it. That was November, 1942.

In February of 1943, the ghetto was closed and indeed there came an order that Bialystok was to be resettled, deeper supposedly into Germany away from the border. Could there be news of my family as well as other families build themselves little boongas. They always consisted of a sub cellar.

**RM:** You built this in your house?

**BS:** Yes, a sub cellar in the house. You put down some food, some water, you know, and you sometimes indeed the action will take place. You were hiding there and we did. We did hide in there because it was people, relatives, caught in the streets or found out the news, hiding places, and they were taken out. They were also the time they approached the Juden Rot, the Jewish Council, to provided with a list of 5,000 Jews that were not able to work, so those will be the first ones to be resettled. The council refused to provide them with a list I guess, and every single one of them was killed right there in the office. And, of course, a new group took over in order to be the liaison between the Germans. And my family too, as I say, built this little building called the boonga, went into the sub cellar and we heard, when the morning, we heard trucks that had special--snow is making when they came into the ghetto and we heard the shooting and the crying, the yelling from nine to five. After 5:00 it's nice and quiet. So for three days we didn't go out, and then on the third day we decided, the youngsters that were there, including myself, we
Shapiro Bluma, Interview 2

says we'll go out and see what's going on. So we found out that indeed for them it was a day's work. From nine to five they worked and then they returned to their families or to their town or whatever. But we found very many bodies in the streets, especially children because, you know, children when they're hiding, they were crying. They're inside the buildings. The Jews are in hiding. So in order to quiet them down, there was no other way but to just choke them to death. Very often the parents themselves sometimes, in order to save the others that were there, so parents choke. Other bodies in the streets laying around. This kind of action continued for 80 days. You know, in 80 days, again quiet. You know, more streets were taken out. More people were coming into the houses that remained and you were not allowed to go out, but you found out that if people who had worked in the factories were not touched. Only we were there for their [indistinct word]. They were not touched. They were sitting in the factories. So my father said, "You will not go out of the ghetto anymore. They'll find you." In order to go to a factory, now you had to provide a machine or something in order to go into work there.

RM: You had to provide a machine?

BS: Provide your own machine. It was like, if it was a sewing factory, you had to provide your own machine. If it was a knitting factory, your needles and thread you know. So he says, "We'll make something that you'll go out of the ghetto." However, while the ghetto was closed in February of 1943, Mr. Hershman passed away and his wife--

RM: He was the one you were working with?

BS: Correct.

RM: Writing the bills.

BS: Yes. And his wife came down to liquidate or sell the business, and she knew nothing about what was going on in the business. The only one that knew was I. So she requested from the Jewish employment office to meet, to deliver me out, to take, allow me to go out of the ghetto so to help her liquidate it. And as I say, we were very reluctant. My father didn't want me to go out. However, being Jewish, we had not much to say, you know. If she wanted to, she demanded. So she herself would come to the ghetto, never inside, outside, standing. I would come from the inside and I would go with her. Of course, she was on the pavement. I was in the middle of the street. And I went with her from place to place and provided the bills so she could collect their money.

At that time, they also had a place in [unintelligible] north Prussia. So one day when I was finished doing the work, she went with me to the governor of Bialystok, the German, and she was trying to get me a pass to go with her to Trisi to continue working for her there.
RM: Because they had another factory there?

BS: Another what?

RM: They had another factory there?

BS: In Prussia.

RM: Oh, in Prussia.

BS: And she wanted me to continue doing it, you know. So of course I didn't want to go and I didn't want my parents, and I was so young, and I just said, "No, I can't go." This time she didn't insist that I should go with her because she had already sold the place in Bialystok. She sold it to a Mr. Otterbuser. [Pause] Did I show you the pictures? I showed it to somebody.

RM: Yeah.

BS: So Mr. Otterbuser and he took over the business, and he, of course, approached me, will I be willing to work with him. Again, the same story. I was really one upped. I had no choice.

RM: Right.

BS: He wanted me to work with him so I worked with him, and he turned out to be a wonderful, wonderful person. First of all, he came himself again to the ghetto and first to pick me up. He would walk with me in the street although he had insignia he's a Nazi member. He walked with me in the street from the ghetto to his house. It was quite a walk, too, but then at that time, we all walked. There were no cars.

RM: Right.

BS: And in coming he took off the insignias that I'm Jewish. I was sitting in the office without the insignia being Jewish. Very often I shared the dinner.

RM: You had some what?

BS: Her dinner, the food.

Interviewer: Okay.
BS: I was sitting at a table with him, him and his wife and his son, and when we would take me back to the ghetto, he would give me something to take home, like a bottle, a can of beer, "to foist on your father," he used to say. And coming to the entrance, he would say to the guard, "She had no contact with the outside. She was always inside. She has nothing in the suitcase but some papers that I want her to work," so I wouldn't be searched. And this is what, again. At one point, he had a friend in Timsit, an elderly woman, and he says, "Just in case the ghetto was to be liquidated, you'll have a place there. We'll take you to Timsit and you'll stay with that woman," and she wrote me a little thing of it to [can't understand] She wrote me a little note and she put some saccharine in the little note. She says, "I'm sorry we don't have enough sugar, but I'll send you some saccharine. You'll still have sweet when you come to my place."

It didn't come to be because unexpectedly on August on 1943 there were Sundays. I was working on Saturdays. Sunday night the ghetto was closed. Sunday nobody was to be allowed to go out anymore, and I was stuck in the house. I don't know whether I would go or not, but the fact is I couldn't go anymore. And I want to tell you that in the ghetto was already an underground work. It was homemade weapons, you know.

RM: Right.

BS: Whatever you could smuggle in or make cocktail things.

RM: Molotov cocktails.

BS: Molotov cocktails, right. And this Mr. Gussoff would tell me what's going on at the meetings, at the Nazi meetings, and I in turn would tell it to the leaders of the underground, so they would sometimes be prepared and anticipating what could happen. And when the ghetto was closed, this underground put fires in all corners of the ghetto enabling some people to escape. It was already a partisan group working in the woods surrounding Bialystok, and some people did escape from the ghetto into the woods joining the partisans.

In the ghetto was a very famous boonga, hiding place. It was called the doctor's boonga. There was a building where all the doctors were concentrated and they had built a boonga--the ghetto was talking about it--that has food and electricity and even a toilet to last a whole year. One of the friends of the family was one of the doctors, and when the ghetto was closed, they came up to the house and he talked to my parents and says, "She's the youngest and she would have a chance to survive. If you go, separate herself from the family, at least. Your boonga's nothing. You'll be caught. At least maybe she'll have a chance to survive in our boonga," which is the doctor's boonga. Well, it's hard to describe this scene that took place at the time when my parents decided it's a good idea and I should go. So I went and it was the last time that I saw my parents. It was the 23rd of August, 1943.
RM: Did you hear from them after that happened?

BS: No, yes. Later on I'll tell you. So I went to the boonga and, indeed, it was everything that they, were heard to be, but there also were children. The doctors also had little children and the children were crying. Through a hole we heard the Germans coming. They couldn't find the entrance, but they knew that Jews are hiding there, although from the underground the people did come to our boonga and told us what's going on and also to collect some food or whatever else they could, crackers. They couldn't have any, but the Germans could not find the entrance to the boonga. But we heard them say, talking, "There are Jews in there. We heard the children crying." For a whole week we heard them outside.

RM: Where was the entrance?

BS: It was hidden. It was hidden under the floor.

RM: Under the floor.

BS: Right.

RM: So they would come into the house but not see it?

BS: Not to the house. It was in a hallway.

RM: Okay.

BS: And under the floor in the hallway was a clap door, some [speaks German]. Some-

KA: False door.

BS: It's in German when I speak about this time, and it's some wooden flats that you pick up.

RM: Okay.

BS: It had to be opened from the inside. You couldn't open from the outside. And we heard them say after the week, we heard them say that, "Well, they don't come out. We can't find the entrance to them. We shall throw a fire bomb and let them burn to death." So of course we decided to give ourselves up, and we went out. We went out. We were marched off. It was already a week after the ghetto was... liquidated, and we came to a plaque not far from the Jewish hospital, and all of the people who were found out, just like we were found out, and here I
met my father. And my father says to me, told me, that the family boonga was discovered in the church, and they were marching towards the railroad station, and my oldest brother was trying to escape and he was shot. My father succeeded by hiding behind a door, but when the group went by they found him and they brought him to that place. I was sitting there overnight on the open field and he was always, and in the morning, they tried to call out different occupations -- carpenters, plumbers and doctors. I went up to the assessment and I asked whether I could take my father with me. I didn't have to do it. I could have taken him just like that, but I don't know what it was. Stupid or the fear that he might be find out and we'll all be shot. I don't know, but I went up to the Gestapo man and asked him if I could take my father with me. Of course, he smacked me in the face, kicked me in the stomach. It was no. I was never to see my father again because I walked over with the doctors and he walked over with the carpenters or what have you.

We were marched to the railroad station. There were already the cattle cars ready for us, about 300 people to a car, and we were given a pail for our physiological needs. We still had other things that we had taken out from the boongas when we were found, when we gave up, so we had some things, but it was so tightly packed that you couldn't even sit down. We had to stand all the time and people were trying to come closer and closer to the window, you know, for the air. And, you know, I myself and many like me, we stopped functioning as human beings. We didn't have to go to the pail. We didn't have to drink. We didn't have to eat. Nothing. We just -- no, no, not any needs that a normal person would need during the day. And when the truck got close up, of course, surrounded by [unintelligible], Ukrainians and Germans, machine guns on top, and while we were traveling we heard some shots, people escaping from the little windows. Very few succeeded to join the partisans. Many were killed while trying to escape, and we were traveling by this way for three days or I lost count of time. And we came to a stop and we heard the sound, we heard the noise that some trains were being taken off the train, some cars were taken off the train, and after that we continued. Then we saw we just passed the station of Malkinia, which Treblinka was located in. Of course we assumed rightly that the people that were taken off were probably taken to Treblinka, and again we rode another 24 or 36 hours. And we came again to a stop. The doors were open and all the time we heard the shooting, you know, constantly because people were trying to escape. And we came to a stop and the doors were opened and we were to come out, and we already had some bodies in our car. We had to take them out and put them on the tracks and we marched in the camp of Majdanek. And we stayed together under the open sky of course, and there a young man who lived with us in the ghetto -- he was himself from another town, but he lived with us in the ghetto.

**RM:** One of the doctors?

**BS:** No, the whole group that came.
RM: Or just from in the ghetto.

BS: In the ghetto. He was somebody that joined our house because his house was taken out, so he knew me. Let's put it this way. So he crawled on all fours through under the fences and he came up to me. He says, "Do anything in the world and go out of Treblinka because nobody is going to--"

RM: Treblinka or Majdanek?

BS: I'm sorry. Majdanek. You're right. "Go out of Majdanek because nobody is going to survive. Majdanek."

I say, "What shall I do? How can I get out of here?"

He says, "Whatever they call, seamstresses, teachers, painters, whatever they call. Go. Don't stay here. So I decided okay, I'll go with the doctors I suppose if they call them out. In the meantime, you know, a group of SS men came riding on horses and we also had children, you know, the women, the doctors' children. We were in the camp with children and one of them grabbed a child from the mother's arm, shot it in the air and shoot the child, and they applauded. His comrades applauded what he did. We stayed like this for 24 hours, a day and a night and the other day and then, again, they started to call out different occupations. So of course I went with the group of the doctors. We went up. Go to the trains, gave us surgeons, and if you had a ring on your finger, or a watch, anything, they took it away, naturally. But if your ring didn't come off fast enough, the finger came off right with the ring.

And we were put again into cattle cars. Everybody was traveling a day or so and we came to another stop. It was another camp and had to be, everything had to be very fast. You go out and fast, fast, fast out of the cars. Okay. We had nothing. We had the clothes that we had on us so we didn't have nothing to carry, and we came onto the camp. It's Camp Blizyn. We camped out and it was a forced labor camp, and here of course we came to an appell field, five people deep in a row and we were counted and assigned to barracks. In the barracks, we were not allowed to go in there before evening. It was dark. We were allowed to go into the barracks. The barracks were like a long, long hall in the middle of which was a so-called stove--it was never lit--made of red bricks. On both sides of the stove were three-story high bones. Every bone had a sack of straw and the army blanket.

Four o'clock in the morning, 5:00, it was too dark, just the stars were in the sky, and by rotation we had to go and bring the so-called breakfast which was black, dark, bitter water, the so-called coffee, and we were counted again, also at five deep we were counted. And this was the first morning we were assigned. Of course, we were separated from the men. The men were separate
from the women. And here we were assigned to go to work. I was assigned to work in a barrack. We were sewing on buttons in the uniforms of the soldiers that were on the Russian front, we assumed, because the uniforms were white so this is camouflage for the Siberian snows. And we were assigned a certain amount of buttons that you were supposed to sew on, but we didn't know how many. So 12:00 noon, a foreman, a civilian would come in and count evidently whether we fulfilled the quota up 'til 12:00. We worked like this 'til 5:00. Five o'clock again rush, rush, fast, fast, fast, fast, to run fast because otherwise you were beaten on the way if you didn't. So you had to run fast into the appell, was again five people deep, and here people who did not fulfill the quota were being lashed, and of course many of them didn't get up after it depending on how short we were to the quota, and they were taken out into the field outside where they were buried because Blizyn did not have any gas chambers. It has no crematories. It was just a forced labor camp.

And here, as I say, the only thing that was just terrible hunger and with it came different sicknesses. So the commander of the camp decided to build a hospital, and the hospital consisted of three departments. The first department was for people who were just tired and weak. They would stay for two weeks or so and go back to work. The second one was for people who had contagious sicknesses and there were plenty of it. There was phlebitis. There was typhus. There was black fever. You name it, we had it, and I had it, too, and I survived.

The first victim of those sicknesses was my so-called adopted mother, the doctor's wife. She had typhus and I sat with her and poured some water. And she was the first one to die, but she died a normal death. She died of sickness and she was taken out and buried into the woods with many others that had died.

The third department was for people who were sort of dead. They were swarmed from hunger, couldn't move, couldn't talk, and the sick of course from there were taken out into the woods where they were buried. There was no medicine. There was nothing. There were doctors but they had no medicine.

Now from time to time we were taken to the showers to change our clothes, and of course you had to grab anything that came along. Again, had to be in a fast tempo, grab from the table a shirt or a skirt, a bunch of, two red shoes or two, right shoes, two left shoes, whatever, and then outside you could change with the other inmates, you know. And here it's a little incident I want to tell you. We were not allowed in the ghetto to have fur, so I had to work outside of the ghetto. So I had a fur coat that I liked so very much, my uniform coat. It had yellow fur, I mean grey fur collar and cuffs, and in order to be able to wear it in the winter, you covered it with some, with black material. And somehow that coat landed in Blizyn, and one of the inmates received the coat and I went after her and I says, "Change with me," and she was a classmate of mine.
RM: So you knew her.

BS: Went to school together. And I said to her, "Change the coat. You know this is my coat. You know that. You recognize this is my coat and I'll give you the coat that I have. I want to have my coat."

She says, "No," and she wouldn't give it to me. But that was the instinct of survival I suppose.

RM: Yeah.

BS: Anyhow, so this is what went on in Blizyn, and after the lashes that I was telling you, there was again counting and we received our so-called dinner. So of course in our rotation, three girls would go and bring a big kettle of so-called soup from the kitchen, and if you were lucky enough to get it from the bottom of the kettle, it had some type of unidentified piece of skin from some of the vegetables. And then you also received a loaf of bread, a pound bread, and a pound, a kilogram actually, two pounds loaf of bread. It was always green from mold and stale, naturally, for four people. And again, we were seated outside until it was dark and then you were allowed to go into the barracks. Now what do you do with a piece of bread so nobody will steal it from you? Often tried to steal it, so you didn't get up. So you either put it in your bosom or as a pillow under your head. However, we had company in the barracks. There were big rats and we felt them crawling on our bodies, and you'd sometimes get up in the morning and the bread was gone. Just little crumbs were left because the rats had eaten up.

Sickness was spreading very bad and people were dying a lot, although there were the doctors, as I say, and there was a clinic so to speak, but there was no medication for them. It went on like this where people were decimated because of the different sicknesses, and at one point, this Christmas of 1943, there was a proclamation that a town near, right from the camp called Rodham is giving a Christmas party for the Jewish children in the camp. And the mothers were so naive, just as I was stupid at the same time, and they believed it, and the Germans giving a Christmas party for the Jewish children in the camp. They handed over the children to the trucks. Of course, the children never returned.

RM: Do you know where they went, where they--

BS: They went to Rodham.

RM: To Rodham.

BS: Yes and no, but they were probably killed or shot on the way and never came back. And in February of 1944, Blizyn was to be liquidated. You see, the eastern part of Poland was about to
be freed by this. Russian army was, and we were to travel deeper into Germany. So again we were loaded onto the cart, onto the cattle cars, and brought traveling, and this is when we came to Auschwitz. Of course, the first thing we saw is this big sign, "Arbeit macht frei," and the first time being counted, the uniforms of the inmates, you know the grey and blue striped uniforms. And in Auschwitz, of course, were not only Jews at the time, and every, every section of the so-called, the people were not Nazis there and the Nazis wore different insignias. So political prisoners had red triangles. Homosexuals had green triangles and so it went. And of course the Jews had the yellow star with the Juden on it.

So again, we came to the parking lot. The gates were open. The assessment with the machine guns and the dogs, and again fast, fast, fast on the run. You had to run. We were separated again from the men. We were taken into a big bare hall. Here we were ordered to undress ourselves and all the body hair was removed from us by men, and here I still had a picture of my family, a little, tiny picture, and I figured I'll put it in the shoes. If I'll come out from the showers, then I'll have the picture. If the showers turn out to be a gas chambers, then it wouldn't make any difference. So that's what I did. I took off the shoe, put in the picture in my shoes, go naked, and we were given a piece of soap and it was with the initials RIF which we interpreted as "rein jidischen fett," pure Jewish fat, and went into, it turned out to be showers. The whole transport from Blizyn went into camp, went into quarantine camp from Auschwitz. Nobody was--no selections were taking place and we all went in the camp, and the men went to their field and we went to the women's field. We were separated only by these high voltage wires, and on the field there was a tower in the corner and there was soldier with a machine gun. It was very easy to commit suicide there, too, in Auschwitz. You either went to the high voltage wirings which electrocuted or you came close to the tower and he would shoot. I was in Auschwitz from 1944 'til the liquidation and only this was one suicide.

RM: You only witnessed.

BS: One suicide, a girl who went onto the wirings and she was electrocuted. And here, as I say, was the quarantines. We were not assigned to work. The barracks were just the same as I described before. The food was just the same as I described before. And in addition, selections were taking place. Morning or evening, depends when doctor, the famous Dr. Mengele, come his entourage and performed the selections. You'll ask me if I ever saw Mengele. I never saw him because, you know, when Auschwitz policy not to look at him, he won't look at you. So everybody tried to be the last one to fit, maybe this will help.

At one point, a friend of mine--I had a friend at kinder camp. She says that she's sick. She cannot take it anymore. She wants to go in the rear. The rear was the hospital barrack. Nobody returns from the rear. I tried to persuade her. "Why do you have to go? Don't go. Stay here. You'll see. We'll get used to it. Something's--maybe we'll be liberated through the fronts coming." No. She
wants to go, and she did. She went to the rear and two days later somehow she smuggled out a piece of paper to me and she says, "Look for me in the smoke of the chimney," and that was it. I never saw her.

The people they were taking out into the selections of the camp, Mengele came. They were taken to a special barracks. Trans C they called it, and through the night, of course, we could hear screaming from the building, crying, and of course in the morning the smell of burning flesh and bones was all over the camp. At one point, the doctor that sort of adopted me was a gynecologist and the assessments are always, well, very many of them were very sick with venereal diseases, and he treated them because of which he would have a little more, another piece of bread or another piece of, another soup or to get another piece of clothes. Auschwitz is located, as you know, in the mountains and it was very, very cold. It was wintertime. So he risked his life and threw over a pair of man's slacks over the fence for me so I can get some clothing, you know. And I did. Of course he was risking his life by doing it. He would also sometimes put a piece, a little bit of soup under the wiring so he did, or throw over a piece of bread. Also by risking his life and I was risking by getting it, but I was doing it for myself.

**RM:** Right.

**BS:** At one point, we noticed that the men aren't there. We had brought an appeal. They had appealed to [can't understand] the same time. They weren't there. Of course we assumed that they were taken to the gas chambers. What else? Not long after that there was a call that everybody has to come out into the center of the field. Auschwitz was built--the rows of barracks. In the middle was a big field. You ever been to Auschwitz?

**Sam Miller:** I have seen pictures.

**RM:** I have. I've been there.

**BS:** So this is how it was. On both sides were the barracks. In the middle was a big field. Everybody was to come to the big field to be registered. The only thing that we still had at the time was our name. Here it was taken away from us. We became numbers.

**RM:** What's your number?

**BS:** We became numbers. A for Auschwitz, 15215 was my number. You notice it is not a straight line. You see, it points and every point was a needle stuck in your skin and this is what it was. So now we are addressed by the numbers, called by the numbers as called. Not long after that there was a selection taking place, naked, in a big hall, bare hall, and Dr. Mengele came and he took out this one woman. He took her out. Of course, we knew that we'll never see her again.
It's also a story to come later. And after that selection, we were assigned to go to another camp. It was called Fraussen concentration camp. It was like a woman's concentration camp, and there again we were assigned to the barracks and assigned to work. I was [stutters] the block eldest here--in the quarantine the block eldest was a Jewish girl. She lost her family. She came from Warsaw. She was there much earlier and she became our block eldest.

RM: A what? What is that?

BS: She was controlling, so to speak--

RM: Okay.

BS: --the inmates in her barrack.

RM: Okay, so you're kind of responsible for.

BS: Well, not responsible. Mean. That's what she brought up. But she had some privileges. She got some more soup and she was commanding with us, you know. And she was Jewish, too. And it was, a very mean person. She was constant screaming at us. "My family went to the chambers and I'll send all of you to the chambers," so much so that at one point she had a branch and she was beating us with this branch while we stayed in the appell. An SS lady came by and took away the branch from her and threw it over the, over the roof. That--she was very, very mean, and she was Jewish. Well, you heard about a couple. You had ten couples. They were inmates, inmates who were appointed by the SS men to do their dirty work, and sometimes you really couldn't blame them for doing what they did because if they wouldn't do it to us, they'd be shot. But this one did it because she did it, you know. There was no couple at the time.

RM: Right.

BS: Okay. So we're already in Fraussen concentration. I was assigned to a group that goes out from the camp into the field to dig ditches for, well, for pipes, for pipes put down. As we were going out, of course the accompanied with the SS men, machine gun and the German Shepherds who were taught to kill. At the exit, entrance of the camp, there was a group of inmates who were singing accompaniments with songs, German songs, and they were marched off. Again, everything was fast, fast, fast, had to go. And at one point they were walking there and I said just to inmates, "I cannot. I have to stop for a minute. I feel that I cannot go on living."

She says, "Don't sit down. The minute you'll sit down, the dogs will come after you. You know what the dogs are taught to do." And, you know, I didn't sit down yet, but I was about to and the dog did come and tore one of my shoes off. Again, I was destined to survive. Didn't touch my
foot, just took one of my shoes off. Coming back into the camp, of course I was in the last row because I had one shoe on, one shoe off so I was slowly walking so I was in the last row, and again inmates were greeting us when we came in. And I was so stupid, drafted to perform another job after working the whole day there and the job--

RM: Was that because you were in the last--

BS: Because I was the last one, so they caught me. More people were slow. I wasn't the only one actually. And with the dish that we had that we drank from and ate from and washed ourselves in, with that dish I had to clean the toilets into barrels that were taken, they were driven by also inmates and we worked like this the whole night, too. Well, it's hard to describe the way we looked and the way we smelled after that job. I came to the barrack and I asked my barrack eldest, which was a Polish girl from Warsaw, and I asked her whether I could remain in the barrack because I have to wash myself at least and the rice may be a few minutes. She answered. She slapped me in the face and immediately I lost four teeth. And she says, "The only alternative you have is if you can't go to work, you can't stay in the barrack. You go into the rear."

I said, "I'll go into the rear." I felt that I couldn't go on working. So this way I said goodbye to the other inmates and they knew that we'll never see each other again because going to the rear was just like a death sentence. But I went, and again I was meant to survive.

So, I came there and there was a Hungarian inmate, a doctor. She took me sort of under her wing and she says, "You'll stay here. I'll give you soup and a piece of bread. You'll have time to rest. You'll be okay." I stayed in that rear a whole week and the rumors came on that Mengele is to come and perform selections. And of course the first ones to go would be the ones who were there the longest, so I had to leave. So she gave me an order to go to the warehouse and get some clothes. So I went and this for the first time that I received already the uniform of the concentration camp inmates and I got a pair of very good shoes which was very important because you spend so much time on the feet.

And I was assigned to work in another field. It was called "Zigeuner-Lager," gypsy camp. Why gypsy camp? A whole transport of gypsies came, stayed overnight, and the whole transport went to the crematoria, so they called it the gypsy camp. Here in a big barrack with long tables they were sitting and making sort of baskets from scraps of rubber and making little baskets. When I came in already all the good seats father away from the door were already occupied, so I was sitting next to the door and my fingers were getting blue and I couldn't make those baskets. So the forelady which was an inmate, a Jewish inmate, and she came up. She saw I cannot do it. She says, "You know, I'll take you up higher," and she did. She took me up higher, closer, where sometimes she would leave the stove, and at one point she organized potatoes and she made, baked those potatoes in the stove and you know, after that, she gave me a hot, salted,
water to drink. I have drank many champagnes since then and beautiful wines. Nothing tasted as good as this salted hot water from the potatoes.

Another thing was unusual in Auschwitz was the foreladies were invited to go to a concert at Auschwitz proper. All this I'm telling you was in Birkenau.

**RM:** Right.

**BS:** To go to Auschwitz proper that the lorries, which means the trucks would come and take them to Auschwitz. This forelady--

**RM:** What would they go there for?

**BS:** For a concert.

**RM:** Okay.

**BS:** Performed by the inmates, of course. You know, at that time all the famous Jewish musicians were in Auschwitz. So she--I don't know whether I had reminded her of her sister or a child. I don't know, but she sort of took to me and she says, "I want you to go with me to the concert." She said, "Well," she says, "People will see you and they'll die from fear that there's a skeleton walking," because I had no flesh on me. I was bones covered with skin and no hair, and you know, so she somehow organized some red paper to put some color on my cheeks and a scarf on my head and a big coat to make me appear bigger, and I went. The trucks came, you know, and we went to Auschwitz and, indeed, I was at a concert and the musicians were taken to the chambers, to the crematoria, the day after it and perished.

From time to time we were taken to a dedlausen which means to get rid of the lice, not for our benefit, but the benefit of the Germans. They're afraid of the lice that we carry on. This brings sicknesses, but going to the dedlausen we went to the showers and changed clothes. Many times you did not go to the showers. It was gas chambers and many people perished by going to the so-called dedlausen.

This kind of life prolonged to January 1945. In January, 1945 there was a proclamation made that Auschwitz was to be liquidated. Whoever wants to march out of Auschwitz is welcome to do it and whoever wants to remain in Auschwitz can also do so. So, you know, the rumor started that maybe the Germans will march out. They will destroy Auschwitz together with the inmates that are left there. So whoever could drag their feet, you know, decided to go on that so-called death march. Sixty percent of the people in the death march perished on the march. I survived. And we were marching and don't ask me how long because I don't know. I had little satisfaction...
while marching. This same block eldest, barrack eldest that knocked my teeth out, you know, she was, as I say, from Poland and she received packages and she kept her stuff or whatever it was. Somehow when I saw a two wheeler and she was pushing these little packages in the hand wagon and of all the people in the march, she approaches me to help her push the thing. And I said, "Uh, uh, you do it yourself." I got a little satisfaction in that.

People were killed because they were going on the sides to, for their physiological needs or couldn't keep up with the march so they're killed. And we had no food, no nothing. We just—I don't know how long it took with the march that we came to a camp, Camp Rosen. At this camp we collapsed on the grounds and was laying there, including myself, didn't have the strength even to stand up and get a piece of bread that was given to us. I was so exhausted.  

**RM:** Was that the first stop you had?

**BS:** That was the first stop from Auschwitz to Gross-Rosen.

**RM:** Gross-Rosen.

**BS:** And here, again, a selection took place and people who were taken—I mean, to remain in Gross-Rosen. Some are to go farther into Germany and I was the one that was going farther into Germany. From here, we already put onto cattle carts, open ones, not, you know, the open carts and it was snow already there and the carts were full of snow, and we went from a railroad station and there were sitting there Germans who were also waiting for the trains, and they saw us. Some of them even tried to throw an apple or a piece of bread towards us and they claimed they didn't know what was going on, you know. But they saw us, and we were loaded onto this thing. Some of them, you couldn't even go up so to help each other to go up on this, on the cart, and we were traveling a little bit and we came to Camp Ravensbruck. Ravensbruck was an annihilation camp just like Auschwitz. They had gas chambers. They had crematoriums, so forth. When we came there, there were already people from different camps, so the bunks were to be shared two and three to a bunk. What shall I do with my precious shoes that nobody will steal it from me? So I said I'll put it under my head as a pillow. Somebody will try to get it. I'll wake up. But again, I was so exhausted and so tired that I didn't feel it. I got up in the morning and my shoes were gone. I was left with a little shoe that only three quarters of my foot hardly went into it. So the inmates tell me that there is a SS lady who's handing out those wooden shoes, so if you'll go there, she'll give you a pair of wooden shoes. At least your whole foot will go into it. That was already March probably. So I went. I went to her and I asked her. She looks at me. She says, "You have shoes." Slapped me. Kicked me. "No, you get the shoes that you have." I did not have to come barefoot in order to get those wooden shoes. And here now she's in Ravensbruck. We just didn't work. The daily routine was as I described in Auschwitz. The same thing. Appell
in the morning. Appell in the evening. Selection through those appells. But we didn't work. We were not assigned to work. And the gas chambers constantly worked.

I want to go back for a minute because in August of 1944 there was an uprising in Auschwitz and I think I want to mention it here. The people who worked at the crematorium, the so-called zonder commando, had destroyed two crematoria. Seven of them escaped.

**RM:** They destroyed the--excuse me.

**BS:** Two crematoria.

**RM:** Crematoria.

**BS:** Yes. There were four, five. Two they destroyed and they escaped, seven of the commando. Three were caught, captured, and brought back and they were hanging. They hung them and we had to stay 24 hours--That was in Auschwitz. I'm coming back--and see them hang and that was bad. So I want to tell you that there was an uprising in Auschwitz proper.

**RM:** Did that affect anything after that?

**BS:** Maybe. There was nothing to change. The routine went on, the same thing. People got killed and brought out to the gas chambers and were cremated, but because of the two crematoria being destroyed, they didn't, the remaining ones could not fit, could not work [stutters] enough to burn the corpses from the gas chambers, so they dug ditches for that and they had a one sheet of food and a sheet of corpse and gasoline put over it and burned it, so all the daylong we saw the fires and the smell of just burning things. Not in the crematoria anymore because they couldn't, they couldn't consume as many bodies because they were two crematoria short.

**RM:** Alright.

**BS:** Okay, so we're now in Ravensbruck, right? So again there were people already, a lot of people from Ravensbruck again. There were too many inmates and they put us again on truck, on cart, on railroad, trains, and we were taken to another place which wasn't actually a camp. It was a, you know, made up to a camp. It was little bungalows and nothing in there. The bungalow was empty, a floor, and there were 25 girls to a room. It was a straw and a blanket and that's it. We were sitting there, and mostly there were the SS ladies there who took care of us and they were very, very mean. They were screaming and beating us and not giving us any food sometimes. It was just terrible. So we were sitting on the floor and we were thinking of what we would do if we were liberated. Although we all talked about it, that they'd come already and made an entry. It's enough. We cannot take it anymore because we didn't do anything. We were sitting there.
RM: Did that help you like go on, I guess, thinking about what you would do if you were liberated?

BS: No, because, you know, I don't know whether it felt good. I had nothing else to do, nothing to talk about, so we were talking about the food and dreaming that maybe we'll be able to sit in a chair with the legs under a table and have enough potatoes, enough bread. We didn't dream about steaks.

RM: Right.

BS: Potatoes and bread. That was the dream. And here my so-called--I called her my camp sister--she found on the ground a manicure set, a manicure set, and one of them, barrack eldest, told, said to her, "If you'll give me that manicure set, I'll give you an extra--I'll give you a loaf of bread." Of course. So she gave it to her and threw the loaf of bread. How can you afford it to eat a whole loaf of bread? G-d forbid. So we cut it up in pieces and sewed up a little bag which was made out of also blanket, an army blanket, and I carried this and once in a while give her a piece of bread and myself a piece of bread from that big--

RM: Just the two of you?

BS: --loaf. Yes, from that loaf of bread. And I was carrying around, carrying around the bread constantly. May 1st--

RM: Um, do you want to break here and switch?

Bluma Shapiro: So May 1, 1945 a group of inmates from Ravensbruck came running into the camp and said, "What are you sitting around here? Look around you. The SS ladies have left. Let's go break of the warehouses,"--because the Red Cross from Sweden had sent packages. The inmates, of course, never received it--"and see what we can get." So we went and whoever had the strength yet to go, and indeed there was a lot of food there and people started to eat uncontrollably, and some of them died from overeating, left behind. Here also, remember I told you in Auschwitz before we went to the final concentration camp [can't understand] came to help one woman. We met her here in Malchow and she was pregnant.

Kathleen Andersen: Wow!

BS: I said--we were so flabbergasted, you know, not enough that she came, but she was pregnant and she came. She survived. What happened? She was very beautiful woman and she told us that indeed she was on the table to have her fetus removed, and an order came to let her go on with
the pregnancy, and she made that march while pregnant and she came to Malchow. And here the SS ladies--would you believe it?--gave us needles and yarn to make little things for the baby. That's how I learned how to knit. Really. This is how I learned how to knit. And she delivered. She had a little girl and they were playing with her, and the same ones who were beating us and screaming at us mercilessly, they were playing with the girl in [stutters]. They were just like women should be when they see a baby.

This little girl, of course she survived. The mother survived. Both survived. She became a doctor in Philadelphia. The mother already passed away since, and indeed when the people came from other camps, as I say, May 1st, they said, "Look at what's down here," and they broke off and some of them overate themselves. And I did, I with my camp sister did not have anything from the packages they had brought in because we also still had our bread. Unfortunately, I was keeping it, as I say, in a warm bag and when I opened it up, it was full, completely molded, and unfortunately we had to throw away the bread that I was cherishing so long. We had to eat around and not allow ourselves to eat. I had to throw it away.

And we were left with men, Hungarian collaborators. They had machine guns, but we didn't know that they had no ammunition in the machine guns because they didn't trust them, I suppose. And they said, "You know what? The Red Army's coming here, let's get liberated by the Allies. Let's get a little bit deeper into Germany, and we'll be liberated by the Americans, French and English." And so we marched over already through what could have been [can't understand] but it wasn't long enough, not much longer, and we were on the way already saw broken up carriages and furniture, also German refugees which made us feel good, too. And they were also escaping from the Red Army in order to be with the Allies. And we heard planes overhead and artillery fire. We came to a big forest. We went into the forest and we saw from afar the ditches of potatoes that the peasants are planting for the coming season, and we threw ourselves on those potatoes like locusts, you know, on our hands and knees, dug out the potatoes and ate them up, and whatever we could carry with us. We came into the forest with those potatoes and our guards were gone. No more guards. Nobody there to tell us when to go, how to go, where to go. What shall we do?

A group of ten girls that we kept together, so we decided we'll stay in the forest and we'll go out in the morning. We'll see what's happening. And indeed, we marched off. It was a little town by a village. It was called Goldenburg, and we went in there. There was a barn. We came to the barn, knocked on the door. It was opened up and there were already French POWs on their way home from the camps into France. They said, "Come in girls. Come on in. You'll see it won't be long and we'll be liberated." Sure enough, in the morning the Red Army came and liberated us, and when they saw us, they couldn't believe that Jewish girls had survived without collaborating. So here my Russian knowledge helped and I spoke to the captain and I explained, "Look at us.
Do we look like collaborators? We're shadows of people." I probably weighed 70 pounds when I was liberated.

So he realized this. He said, "Okay. You can go into the house and you take whatever you can, food or clothing, whatever," and then the German girl, the German hostess, was very happy to have us rather than the Soviets, and she gave us anything we wanted. She didn't have much actually, but whatever she had, take it. And the first thing I did, I took off my dress, and my dress, I want to tell you, walked on its own. It was so full of lice. Literally, took it off and walked away. So I got some clothes from her. We washed ourselves, and then he says to go into another little building that was there and lock yourself. So he put a sign, "typhus" so the soldiers could not attack us. They were trying to attack us. They didn't care whether we were inmates in camps or girls. They came from the front, you know.

So we stayed overnight with sign "typhus," wouldn't approach us, and in the morning the captain says, "You're better off in the city," the city nearby. So we went into the city. Again, the German woman was very happy to have us and was in, and the girls started to go to the German houses in order to get some clothes and to get some food. And I was so dumb, you know, that when I came to the house, so I said, "Excuse us and would you please," so my main said to me, "You stay home. We'll bring you the food. You are too nice for them." And indeed I didn't go anymore, so they brought everything. We shared it, ten of us kept us together. We shared it. There were four of us from the same hometown and six were from other towns and we kept together. The Soviets opened up soup kitchens and without control--you know, the Allies controlled the inmates. They gave them slowly the food and not much to begin with, but not the Soviets, no control at all. You eat as much as you want and take whatever you want, and that was a killer. As a matter of fact, one of the girls from my hometown we had to leave behind. She died of overeating. And they wanted us to go with them to take us to the Soviet Union. We'll arrange for you to become members of the government farms and you'll become Soviet citizens, but we knew already the Soviet Union was a communist regime and had been for two years. We said, "No, thank you." We were free to do whatever we wanted to, and so we left them, went over the other side of the train station, the railroad, and there was my brother-in-law sitting around the court. We came there again. No men were to be seen. The German woman who took us in was very happy to see us rather than soldiers, and we have to organize some food because she didn't have much food. There were three of us and her, so we went in the street, were talking what we can organize. So we're talking in naturally Jewish, and two soldiers sort of stopped us and says, "We are Jews in the Soviet Army. What can we do for you?"

I says, "food." They organized us a whole lamb, ten pounds of potatoes and ten pounds of bread, and we consumed it in one sitting and we survived it. And after we had those ten pounds of potatoes, we used to say to our hostess, "Could you make us some fried, French fries, fried potatoes," and it was lucky for us, you know, that it didn't affect us. So then we stayed there for--
that was in May—we were liberated in July. Then the soldiers said to us that there's a train going to Poland via Bialystok. If you would like to go with them, you can take it. Of course, of course. So they organized. They gave us some clothes. We had big bags of clothes already there. They gave us some money from Poland. Poland was already a year after the liberation. Bialystok was liberated in 1944, in August of 1944. It was already a year later. And he says go. We went. The three of us went and the journey usually would take probably 12 hours. It took three weeks, but we made it. We came to Bialystok, and as I say, Bialystok was already liberated, and they said, "The train will stay here for a whole weekend, so if you want to go deeper into the Soviet Union, you'll have the choice."

So we went out and somehow—I don't really remember how—we organized [stutters] a horse and wagon. We put all our belongings and we came into the city, and the city was already organized. There was a Jewish contact [stutters] We went there and we saw a lot of Jews already that came from different camps, from hiding in Bialystok proper. You know, in Jewish homes they were in hiding and they were liberated, so I tried to inquire. I didn't have any hope of other members of my family, but my brother I mentioned was sent up to Siberia by the Soviets. I had hope that maybe he had survived not knowing that at the time there was a certain member. She left and she organized a Polish division with the Red Army and he was also in the division. And I met a neighbor of ours and she told me, yes, your brother was here. He was one of the liberators and inquired about the family, and I tell you he found nobody, so he continued with the front, and then later on from the Red Cross he must have found out that he was killed in the front.

So people already, as I say, having jobs and working already, so one of my girls found a cousin that was there. She was liberated from Austroish, Prussia earlier. She was, I think, already in a house, in a sort off—it was one big room that was her condo so to speak. There was one big room and a little kitchen, and she—there were three of them and three of us, and we settled down together. And I stopped. I said, "We have to do something. We have to start working, get some bread or some food, some clothing." So I got, and of course, as I said, I was already then an accomplished secretary because I worked for the Germans, and I got a job with the government. It involved a private secretary of my boss. And I want to tell you that was already late 1945, beginning of 1946, and he was to go to a little town outside of the city, and of course I took it for granted that I'll have to go with him to take notes and so forth. He says, "No. Don't go because it's not safe yet for Jews to go in those little towns," because I don't know whether you're familiar with 1946. There was a pogrom, a [can't understand] pogrom. That's a group of Jews that came from the camps and from hiding, and they settled in one house and they were all killed in that house by the Poles. So he didn't take me, but I worked at this.

And then my camp sister and her cousins decided to leave Poland and they went to Germany in order to go to Palestine via Germany, you know, and so I took in some more people that came from the camps. I took them in, and at one point this house was to be demolished because it was
like, wasn't very safe to stay there, so I had to look for another place to stay. So I, my oldest brother had a house and the house was standing on the main street, but it was occupied by people living there. From the little towns they came into Bialystok. Again, it wasn't safe for Jews in the little towns, and I came up to the house and I said, "I don't want you to leave, but I would like to have a room here because the house belongs to my brother," but it was no problem and they took me in and a woman with her niece that stayed with me and we took that, and here I met my husband. Somebody wanted to ask me how I met my husband. Somebody wanted to know this time, right? But this is when I met my husband and I shouldn't talk anymore, should I, because this is after the liberation.

**Sam Miller:** The liberation itself, I think.

**BS:** Okay.

**SM:** I actually have a couple of questions about--you mentioned a pregnant woman. Your friend was pregnant with a kid so I guess there were actually some free time.

**BS:** No. She came pregnant.

**SM:** Oh, she ended up pregnant before.

**BS:** Maybe she didn't know. She--we counted out, you know, that she became pregnant in Blizyn.

**SM:** Uh, huh.

**BS:** There also we separated us. We still had contact if we wanted. Her husband was there so they had contact and she conceived, evidently there. But, you see, we didn't know whether we were pregnant or not because we didn't menstruate. Nothing happens here so we didn't know, and she didn't know herself actually until they took her out. Yes. But there was no contact with men whatsoever. The time when men would come, let's say to repair the barracks or something, we had to go out.

**SM:** Uh, huh. You, when you were a little, like how old were you when you first--

**BS:** I was 16 when the war broke.

**SM:** You were 16 when it started.

**BS:** In '39.
SM: So you were kind of more mature. You weren't--

BS: I was already 20 in 1943.

SM: Uh, huh. When you were, when the Germans first began to occupy Poland, were you and the rest of your family aware of what their views were going to be, like what was in store for you, even though they were just starting to set up ghettos?

BS: The thing is that we knew what the Germans are doing because for three years already occupied western part of Poland, and there were refugees coming and telling us what was going on. But as I said before, we did not believe that it will happen to the Jews in Bialystok. We were all productive Jews. You know this is, you know that adage it will happen to me, it happens to somebody else.

SM: Yeah.

BS: And this is what the mentality. We also, we could have chances to also go into villages and be hidden by the peasants for bringing some clothing or bringing some food with them. They would keep us, but oh, it won't happen to us. We are productive Jews, "nutzlich Juden. So that's what it was so--but it don't, yeah, that was, we knew what was happening, but as far as the concentration camps, we learned later on. But we knew that they are set out to annihilate the Jews, but not us. You know, it was always not us.

SM: So then when the Germans did end up taking you, did they make any excuses, or did they just tell you--

BS: Nothing. They were screaming. They didn't tell anything. There was no telling. There was just screaming. Screaming and yelling and, you know, and using some weapons, whatever, to, fast. Everything had to be rush, rush, rush, fast, fast, fast. Everything had to be rush, fast. Everything thing had to be very fast tempo like they were afraid we were going to be late to take us out. I don't know. But it was, everything was just fast.

SM: Yeah. While you were in the camps, did you or anyone that you were friendly with or know try to maintain any sort of Jewish identity?

BS: Yes. We did. We did. You know in late '44 there came a transport from Hungary. Of course, as I say, we don't know what day it is, whether it's Monday or Sunday or whatever. But in '44 there came a transport from Hungary and they told us that a week from now will be Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the most holy day in Jewish religion. And some of us, including myself,
deprived ourselves of even special bread and a little bit of soup so we fasted the day. Not all of us naturally. Some did. And I, we did. We didn't eat that day.

SM: Mmm, hmm. So you tried to--

BS: And there was always. I don't know what it was. Well, the people to say that we are indoctrinated. We were brain washed in doing it, but the thing is that some of us--I would say maybe the majority--lost faith in G-d. As you know, Elie Wiesel said, "G-d died in Auschwitz."

SM: Yeah.

BS: But I never did because I was brought up in a semi-Orthodox family, Jewish family, and I knew some, learned something about the Bible and so forth, and I knew that Jews had a choice. Not Jews. People have a choice. It says in our prayers that the heavens are made for G-d and the earth is made for people, and people have a choice that they--they have the good or to be bad. Don't blame G-d for it. If you want to be bad, it's you. G-d didn't make you that way. You had a choice. If you made a bad choice, then you blame you. So I never, never ever blamed G-d, so much so that, you know, I was even at times grateful to G-d that my parents didn't have to go through what I'm going through. I knew the end would be the same, but they already didn't suffer. I was suffering for two years later. So that was something that G-d sent down to my parents. They were good and too, they were ready.

SM: So your family was big, right? Like somewhat big. I mean, you have aunts and uncles.

BS: Well, you can say close. We were five children. Four of them were married and had children of their own and the parents. Of course, I had aunt and cousins. Nobody survived. Nobody.

SM: Did you ever, while you were in the camps or anything, learn of what was going on with your family? Like did you have contact with them at all or--

BS: Well, as I told you, when I found out that my immediate family was taken out and they perished. No. I had no contact. I didn't even know that I had any relatives outside of Poland, outside of Europe. After the liberation, somehow it came to me that I had an uncle in Israel, and I remembered his address, too. So I wrote to him and, indeed, I had an uncle there, and he sent me a visa to go to Israel. In the meantime, I got married and changed my name so I couldn't utilize the visa, and my husband wanted to go to the States. He didn't want to go to Palestine at the time, you know. And so I was very, very upset that I will not go to Israel, number one, and secondly that I won't see the only member of my family, my uncle who I knew because he left in '36 so I remembered him. So I wrote to my uncle that I'm going to America and I'm very unhappy because I have nobody in America and my husband wants to go there. And there was a saying
you go with your husband everywhere. So he says, "Don't worry, my child. You have an aunt in America." And I found out that I had an aunt in America. Of course, she left in 1905 when the first revolution took place. She was one of the lefties, so the family never mentioned her name, you know. So it was a good thing to talk about. I never knew that she existed. So my uncle, that was his sister. So he says, "Yes, she left," and he told me the whole story, that she was leftist. She was a member of the Communist Party. That's why she left. She run away and all that and she was in America. And my Aunt, who should rest in peace, she never changed her views. So she never became a citizen of America. She was one of the first ones to organize the strikes with the unions and all that. So she wanted so badly to see her brother in Israel. She could go, but she wouldn't be able to come back. So she never left the United States. She never became a citizen. So when I came to the United States, I had an aunt. Of course, she passed away already since. And I was in Israel several times. I still had met my uncle. He was still alive and I went to Israel, and he had a daughter so I met a cousin. They're all gone unfortunately.

SM: What about friends from Bialystok? Did they end up going with you or were you all--

BS: Some of them. Some of them went all the way with me, you know. I told you a classmate of mine.

SM: Yeah.

BS: And then after the liberation when she also returned to Bialystok--many of us returned with hope against hope that maybe somebody survived, you know, and we were in contact. I'll tell you, when I got married in February of 1946 there were 300 Jews, survivors, in the city of Bialystok. All 300 were at my wedding. It wasn't an elaborate wedding like here, but all 300 were at my wedding. And you know what? We had to lock our doors because the Poles were knocking. They wanted to come in and they wanted to do some harm, so we had some partisans with us, too, and they had ammunition. They had weapons so they protected us. But people could come, came already from Russia, too. People who were evacuated from the Soviet Union came back, too, also. So 300 Jews, they were all at my wedding. Many of them, of course, I knew from before the war. Some of them I knew from the camps, also Bialystok. So we kept in contact for a long, long while. When I went to Israel, I met them there. They were in Israel, too, so we met them again.

It was--and you know what? Talking about going to Israel. Mr. Mussen, I have to tell you that after the ghetto was liquidated, he went to the ghetto. He knew my address. He knew where I lived, and being a Nazi member, he was allowed to go, and he went in there and he came to the house and he found a little picture of me and picked up three pieces of silverware. He took it with him. Two girls that knew what kind of a man he was, as the ghetto was liquidated, they went to him. One of them was like, you know, lingered in the different ghettos. She looked like a
non-Jew so she could do that. She went to him and told him that she's a friend of ours, could he help them. He took those two girls into his house. He built a double wall. He kept them in there. His wife and son left him. They didn't want to risk their lives, which I don't blame them for it, and he remained in Bialystok, still working and kept those two girls inside there. They had a contact with the partisans. Again, he would tell there was a going on, and she would in turn tell the partisans, gave them weapons when he could organize this through the partisans. And when Bialystok was to be liberated by the Soviet Union, he said he's gone. He's leaving. I said, "Why don't you leave? He'll tell them you are. You know, he might get even a medal."

He said, "By the time they explain to the Soviets who I am, we'll all be killed." And he went back to Prussia. He was drafted in the siege of Konigsberg. It was the capital of Prussia, and he was captured and he was in a POW camp in the Soviet Union. He was liberated in 1956, so so many years later. And he tried to find me, and through the Red Cross and different organizations of survivors in Israel, he did find out that I had another name and I'm in America and he got in touch with me. And he, through again, the woman, remember, who wanted to give me some saccharine to sweeten my life? She left Prussia and went to East Berlin, also away from the Soviets, and he gave her those three pieces of silverware when he was drafted. He said, "Maybe if she'll come back, you'll have something," but sure enough, he contact me with her. Did I show you the silverware? I think somebody else did.

Rachel Mirsky: No, no. The break the next time.

BS: Is it okay?

RM: That's okay. It's okay.

SM: While you were in the camps, you had--I mean you worked a lot, but did you ever have free time? No? It was--

BS: The time that we had, we were made to mingle outside, you know. We couldn't go into the barracks until it was dark, and then we were so grateful to put ourselves, our bodies already were beaten, a little sleep if possible, you know. And very often, you'll come out and your neighbor next to you was dead. So, free time, no.

SM: So you ended up getting weaker every day more or less.

BS: True, true, very true, very true. I was never a big person. I got thinner and thinner. I just, as I say, in Malchow when we were, the last place, you know, first a barrack elder, she was dispatched too, just one room, she says to me, "Tell me, Bluma. What did you look like in real life?" She just couldn't imagine what I looked like in real life.

Shapiro Bluma, Interview 2
SM: I think when we were talking before you said you were not a very big person, but when you lived in Poland before everything happened, did you ever interact with many of the inmates or anything? Like, I mean you became friendly with some.

BS: Yes, that's right.

SM: But did you ever interact with like groups of inmates?

BS: No, maybe not. Everybody had their own little clique and you would stay close with them. It must have been trauma that we don't get too close because you don't know what's going to happen. You know, you might lose them. So maybe that was the reason, but I was very close with this, as I told you, my class--I called her, we called ourselves sisters.

SM: Yeah.

BS: It's also a story what happened, but no. Everybody had their own one or two or three that they kept together, mostly from their hometown, you know. Although in Malchow I befriended very much two Hungarian girls because we were laying side by side on the floor and we had gotten the bread for the four of us--myself, my sister and those two Hungarian girls, and we had the bread, you know, so we got very close. And you wouldn't believe it. In 1951, we had a grocery store here in Baltimore, and who walked in but one of the Hungarian girls.

KA: Wow.

BS: And I recognized her, too. "Silanka!"

SM: That's amazing.

BS: And she, by the way, she had told me that the Jewish girl, there was such a mean, mean person it was in the first quarantine, they found her in Frankfurt, a mine in Germany, and they beat her up and they go to, went to the authorities and told them what she had done and she was arrested.

KA: Wow.

BS: Sally.

SM: They gave you the straw and the army blankets to sleep on.
BS: It wasn't, it was a, yes, a bag of straw, yes. Not everybody got it. We got it.

SM: Yeah, so you were lucky.

BS: Privileged. We had it.

SM: Were there any other ways that you kept warm? I mean, you talked about how--

BS: No.

SM: --your friend or the doctor would throw the pants over.

BS: Right.

SM: And, but they didn't give you--

BS: No, they count, you got your clothes but, as I say, you had, whatever you could catch, fast, fast. And they didn't care about having serviceable clothes. We weren't ourselves in another, you know. We taken clothes to one another to warm ourselves. And it's funny. I don't remember being cold or hungry. Isn't that something?

SM: Yeah.

BS: I really don't remember that, that I was complaining about the cold or being hungry. No. I just don't know. You know, there's a saying, you shouldn't be prove it, you can get used to it. And we'd gotten used to that kind of life, if you call it, life. Yes. Existence.

SM: Yeah. How many people lived in each barrack or whatever, like house?

BS: Approximately, I would say about 300.

SM: So, they just stuffed a whole bunch of people there.

BS: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. But they were always decimated because they died and they were killed, but they got-- And, you know, new ones wouldn't come into the same barrack. So when another transport came, another barrack was occupied with it. Yeah, I would say about 200 or 200. I don't even know exactly.

SM: What were the sleeping conditions like with that many people?
BS: Well, as, we were all dead tired by the time we got into the bunks, so we just fell asleep. Sometimes, as I say, the next day when they touched him in your sleep and he was cold. He was dead already.

SM: I remember--

BS: And sometimes we had--in Auschwitz we didn't have rats because there was nothing to eat for them, but in Blizyn, in the first one, we had the rats crawling all over us.

SM: And when we were talking with, um, Steve, the doctor that's working with us, he said that someone told him a story about when they all wanted to roll over, or when one person wanted to roll over, everybody, the whole group would have to at the same time.

BS: That's right, because we were so close situated, you know. So many people in the barracks. So everybody had to turn.

SM: All at the same time.

BS: Yes.

SM: So you kind of--

BS: You woke up, but you fell asleep again because you were so exhausted. The only time that you really stopped thinking was when you fell asleep.

SM: Kind of a getaway.

BS: Sort of, escape.

SM: Yeah, escape from the--

BS: From the reality of the daily life.

SM: What language did you mostly speak there?

BS: In the camps? Mostly Jewish.

SM: Mostly Jewish.

BS: Yeah, mostly Jewish.
SM: There wasn't like--

BS: We also spoke a little Polish, but mostly we spoke Jewish.

SM: They didn't put restrictions on--

BS: No.

SM: --what languages you could speak or--

BS: No, no. There was none. No control over that.

[phone rings]

SM: I just have a few more questions. Did you ever sing songs or anything?

BS: Yes. Yes we did. You know, when we worked in the barracks sitting, we were singing songs and yes, when we were sitting outside, let's say, in the quarantine, so we also sang. We sang songs. We did.

SM: While you were in the camps, were you aware of what was going on outside, like the progress of the war that was going on in Europe?

BS: We know, we sensed it. If the restrictions were stronger or we are limited in certain things, the front is coming closer. And again, transports came after we were there, and they came from the war so to speak, so they would tell us that the war is about to finish. So far they are here. They're already there, you know. Yes, we did. And of course when they said that Auschwitz to be liquidated, we knew that the war is almost over for Auschwitz, you know. But the fear that it will be destroyed together with us, [can't understand]. After the liberation, I met some people who remained in Auschwitz, you know, and they were liberated already in January of 1945, almost half a year later.

SM: Yeah, so it kind of gave you a little hope.

BS: Hope, yes.

SM: You would hear rumors that--

BS: Rumors, yeah. We did hear them.
SM: --the Russians were coming.

BS: But the assessments were very strict, stricter than they were before, or more mean, meaner than they were before, that we knew that something's wrong on the front.

SM: Were you also aware of like current events going on or anything?

BS: No.

SM: Sort of like--

BS: As I say--

SM: So when Hitler killed himself, you never-- I remember.

BS: Hitler killed himself?

SM: It was like rumored that Hitler shot himself.

BS: No, we never knew that. We didn't hear there was an attempt on his life. We found it out later.

SM: Yeah.

BS: So, no, we didn't know anything was going on. No. I didn't anyway. Some others did, but I didn't. And you know, we didn't even care about it.

SM: Yeah. I think that's pretty much all I have. Oh. I was looking up on the internet and it said something about the Bialystok ghetto uprising in 1943.

BS: Yes.

SM: You were still in Bialystok during that.

BS: Yes.

SM: What was that?

BS: I told you about it.
SM: Oh, that's what you were talking about before. Okay.

BS: Yes. There was an uprising that took place in Bialystok ghettos where many of my persons vanished in the uprising.

SM: Okay. Did you ever, while you were in the camps, were you ever able to get any little-- Like I mean you talked about the bread that that lady gave you and you put it all into a little sack and cut in pieces. Did you ever get anything like that from anywhere else? Like, were you ever able to get a little piece of chocolate or ever make matzo or anything?

BS: We didn't even dream about chocolate, let alone getting it. No.

SM: Even when you were like going out into the towns and everything?

BS: We didn't.

SM: You didn't.

BS: We were always under control.

SM: Uh, huh.

BS: We had no contact. We shouldn't have any contact, but the only town that, as I say, with Soviet, civilian Germans, when we go from Gross-Rosen to Ravensbruck and they threw something to us, at us. But, no. G-d forbid. No, nothing.

SM: And then I think that's it. Is there any other memories or anything that stands out particularly in your mind?

BS: No, I think I covered it. It might be better off to leave. I'll remember something.

RM: I have another question if you don't mind me chiming in.

BS: Not at all.

RM: I'm interested to know what kinds of examples you would have, if any, of inmates, Jewish inmates and other inmates trying to like maintain humanization while they're in the camps because--

BS: Yes.
RM: --obviously at lot of what Nazis did was try to like make you feel--

BS: You're right.

RM: --like you're a dog, not a human.

BS: Right, yes.

RM: So what, did anything go on to make you--

BS: Yes. I tell you, we supported each other. We, there was a case where a woman kept on saying she has a weaker heart and she can't take it anymore. She's going to die. So we talked to her and embraced her and kept her warm, you know, warm ourselves, and gave her hope, gave her hope that we didn't have ourselves, but we tried to give her survival skills, she'll survive, because in bad times you get stronger and so forth and so on. There was a tremendous support between the inmates. See, for instance, let's say if somebody was, had died and left a piece of bread, we shared it. It wasn't one that took it. That was in my barrack. I don't know whether it was all over the same story, but this is what it was, you know. We tried to support each other very much.

RM: Okay. That answers my question.

BS: You know, while I was sort of adopted by the doctors, so he, from time to time, he would get from the assessment also some bread or some soup or some vegetables to make a soup, and I would cook the soup on the hospital stove, you know, and we shared it with other, with everybody who was able still to eat, you know. And there was a girl when I was sick, and she tried to smuggle in some pieces of bread that she had baked on the reverse side of an iron.

RM: Uh, huh. Oh, wow.

BS: At night, risking her life doing it, you know. Somehow she, the people were working outside in Blizyn. They were working outside in a quarry, and they somehow got a contact there with the non-Jewish population, and somehow they got some flour smuggled into the barrack. At night when she was working on the night shift, she would mix the flour with some water and bake it on the reverse side of an iron and smuggled it into the hospital to me. She didn't know my name, but we were sitting at the same table sewing, you know, and this is what I wanted to tell you.

Tremendous support. By risking the life, the doctor who risked his life, you know, in order to help me. So it was, yes, it was a camaraderie in that respect, you know. Supported each other
mentally. Physically, there wasn't much you could do, but mental, we all tried to support. And the songs, the songs we were singing. That also kept us up, you know.

**RM:** I just have one question. While you were in the camps, I know that you dealt with the SS and you had the female. I don't know what the exact title would be, but the--

**BS:** SS ladies.

**KA:** The SS ladies. Okay.

**RM:** The other.

**SM:** The other.

**KA:** The person that wasn't an SS, the Yiddish--

**RM:** Right. The guard that took--

**BS:** Oh, the guard.

**RM:** I meant, I was just interested--

**BS:** She's talking SS.

**RM:** Right. I was just interested in what the differences were in terms of how they treated. I read different things. I always have the sense of a slight difference. I don't know in terms of this or not. You know, if a woman was treating a woman differently versus the men who just didn't understand.

**BS:** Well, we felt the SS girls were much worse than the men. Sometimes you had the impression that the men were doing what they were told to do, and the girls were doing because they wanted to do. Most of them were undereducated, came from very backwards families. They could hardly speak a correct German, the SS ladies I'm talking about, and that was, they gave them power. You know, it gave them power to, to belittle us, to treat us not like human beings, not like dogs. She says dogs. No. Dogs were treated very well. Not once did you see a bush, there was a dog. You know, dogs were treated very well by the Germans, but if, like crawling insects that would step on us, which they did. Kicked without a reason, you know. Although, as I said before, there was one who didn't, who corrected the inmate, the Jewish inmate, but that was a rarity. Rarely. Rare occasion. It was always, later on, of course, I found out there was--I had to tell it to somebody--that there was, you guards had a lot of Germans, and one of the assessments,
one of the guards in Auschwitz came from Bialystok and he recognized an inmate, a man. I found out about it later, and he used to give himself a little bit of bread, treated him a little better than everybody else, so there were such occasions. But unfortunately, they were very few and far apart.

**RM:** Also, just to expand on that, did you see instances where, when, oh you gave me, you just gave an instance of someone who recognized someone else even though he was a German Jew, but did you see instances where--I mean, I don't know if there was hearsay, whatever, but you know, these people knew these, you know, maybe some German knew these other Jews and it didn't make a difference, you know, whether or not, just because they knew each other before the war--

**BS:** No, some of them didn't acknowledge that they knew--

**RM:** --and all of a sudden it didn't make a difference.

**BS:** No, someone didn't acknowledge me, though they know that we met. Although, maybe could be that the inmate, you know, recognized the man, but he wouldn't say that. And the Germans would not admit that he knows him, you know. It could make, it depends upon the individual, you know. That's why I say you cannot generalize those things. It depends. And they felt--you know, they were people who were deprived of everything else that was good in life, in normal life, and here all of a sudden they were so powerful. They could do anything they pleased with the inmates and they did. Some of them took advantage of it. Some, the majority did.

**RM:** Also, just to expand on that. Did you see any instances when--I mean, I understand if the German, you know, if this German SS didn't follow orders, obviously things would happen, but in terms of whether, when they weren't being watched, whether they were maybe struggling with themselves or, you know, trying in some way because maybe they couldn't stand it anymore and at some point, you know, because, you know, they themselves were like an inmate.

**BS:** I understand.

**RM:** They would say, "Enough already," or something like that.

**BS:** You mean they became human for a minute.

**RM:** Possibly. I'm just--yeah, maybe that's not possible.

**BS:** I haven't seen it. Maybe it was, but--
RM: That's not really--

BS: I didn't come across anything like that, no. I didn't see any human deeds except when the baby was born in Malchow, you know, and the SS ladies made us make clothes for them. But by the same token, they [stutters] the big SS came to us and treat us like dirt, but with the baby they gave her advice. Some human being things were in them.

SM: You were in a camp called Malchow?

BS: Malchow.

SM: Mowchoff.

BS: You would say Molchow here with a C-H.

SM: That was a factory, wasn't it, for--

BS: It was nothing. We didn't do anything there.

SM: Oh, okay, because I read on the internet that it was a factory for building weapons for the military or something that was made.

BS: Possibly. It was maybe before we came because we came already in May, was the end of the war. There was really nothing there. We were sitting and literally waiting for that to liberate us because we really didn't believe anymore that we were liberated.

SM: So you didn't have to work.

BS: No, we didn't work because--

SM: You just sat.

BS: We were sitting there not working. It was worse yet.

KA: And you said that sometimes you would, a person would reach over to the person next to them when they were sleeping and they were cold and you knew that they had already died. Did that happen to you?

BS: No.
KA: You got quiet and I thought maybe.

BS: No, it didn't. I had really had that experience, no. I just, the only death that I really witnessed was when this adopted mother of mine died because I was at her bedside when she died. There was another man. He was also from Bialystok and he was dead. That means the Jewish hospital. He was a big man, a healthy man, and this was probably the first one to go as far as [can't understand]. He was screaming, had a high fever. He was screaming bloody murder and then it was quiet, so he had passed, [can't understand]. You asked me before. I would know that this woman came to me and his wife was liberated in Auschwitz. She remained. She was in the hospital. She couldn't work so she remained and she was liberated, and I met her later on when I came back to hometown.

RM: Can I, one more, I'm sorry. It just occurred to me and I don't know. I mean, if you don't know, I don't, but you mentioned a Mengele [mispronounced] in Auschwitz, the, you know, the doctor.

BS: Mengele?

RM: Mengele, right. Did you hear anything from other inmates or just hearsay, I mean in terms of like details in terms of what he did?

BS: It just told you about the girl who was--

RM: You would say that they would take them and they would just never come back. I mean, in terms--

BS: But she wasn't the one who did anything. He just picked them out and he has a whole stash, staff, of doctors who performed all the atrocities on those, all the experiments, you know, under his supervision. But again, the same story. Nobody looked at him to recognize his face. But it was enough that somebody said, "Mengele is coming." That was it. We tried to tilt our eyes, not look at him, hide behind something or something not to look at him. And this girl, she didn't see him, but she knew the order came not to remove the fetus. The one that gave birth in Malchow. People who Mengele took out very rarely survived unless they were experimented upon, and there was a big going-on with experiments. You know, there was the barracks of the dolls. They didn't tell you about it.

SM: I think someone heard about it, though.

RM: [can't hear]
BS: Oh, we didn't speak to some. Anyway, there was a barrack of the dolls in Auschwitz proper and Mengele took out those girls when they first came to Auschwitz, nice and fresh and beautiful, and put them in a barrack in Auschwitz proper for the use of the German soldiers. And they got chocolate.

RM: [laughs]

BS: Because I met one of the girls after the war and she came from Bialystok. Of course, she never talked about it, but here and there she would drop something.

SM: That was in--

BS: In Auschwitz proper.

SM: There was another one that you were in. I don't know how to pronounce it. Robbins?

BS: Ravensbruck.

SM: Bruck. That was also, didn't they do a lot of experimenting?

BS: Yes, that was the same thing as Auschwitz, same kind of camp, but also, again, when we came there, it was quieted down because they had so many inmates from different camps coming there, and the fear of the front coming. So they quieted down.

SM: Right. Did you ever know anybody who ended up being a victim of the--

BS: Experiments?

SM: --experiments or anything.

BS: I just told you about it. That was the one.

SM: That was the only one?

BS: The only one. No. I also met a half of twins that were experimented upon, but her twin died. She was of them survived.
RM: Is there--I'm sorry. Was there something like when Mengele would come and he would, you know, pick someone out and people wouldn't look, but is there something? He just picked out a random person or was there something?

BS: Random.

RM: It didn't matter that were something, like if you didn't look at him, it didn't--

BS: No.

RM: There was nothing.

BS: He knew that. He was a very smart person, but he knew that the ones in the back are hiding from him, so he would sometimes he would take them out from the back, too.

RM: It didn't matter whether you were male or female, your age?

BS: No, female only. We had no contact with the men. We didn't know what was going on with the men. It was all separated. You know that. But he would take sometimes the tall ones, sometimes the little ones. Sometimes the blondes, sometimes the brunettes. There was no rule. Whatever his whim was at the moment, unless there was a whole transport like it happened with the gypsies. You know, there came a transport from the island of Rhodes, young, beautiful girls in high heels and gorgeously dressed, with beautiful luggage, you know. They came to camp dancing and singing and they went. The whole transport went to the crematorium. They didn't know what was going on. They said, "You all are going to a camp," you know, but, a vacation or something. They didn't realize. They didn't know what was going on, and they went all to the crematorium.

KA: They had the barracks of the dolls and after, when you were going, as the war was ending and you put the sign up for typhus so that the soldiers would leave you alone, was that a common fear? Was that a common thing that happened?

BS: Attacking the girls, yeah, front soldiers.

KA: But I mean even in the camp?

BS: No. I haven't heard of anybody being raped by SS men, no, unless they would go to the doll barrack. He provided them with this. No, I haven't heard of anybody being raped. I didn't. Not even, you know in Blizyn it was easy to attack the little girls, you know, but I haven't heard of any. They were so indoctrinated that whoever had contact, or sexual contact with the Jewish girls
were killed. There was a question of race, you know, so I haven't heard of it. It could have happened, you know, in the ghettos at work. It could have happened there, but not in the camps, not that I'm aware of.

SM: I guess if there's no other questions or [pause] Is there anything else you want to add or anything that you--

BS: As I said, maybe when you leave, I'll think of something. Usually – “Oh I should have thought of that—”

SM: Alright. Well, thank you.

BS: If there are any questions that you have, feel free to call.

SM: Uh, huh. I'm sure one will pop into my head when I go to sleep tonight.

BS: Yes, that’s exactly right--

KA: Do you have email?

BS: No.