

Testimony of Szyja (Chiale) Kramer

Excerpt from “SURVIVORS OF THE SHOAH” Transcript
Edited version

Date: July 9, 1997
Survivor: Szyja Kramer
Interviewer: Aleksander Laks
Translated by: Carlos André Oighenstein
City: Rio de Janeiro
Language: Portuguese

My name is Aleksander Laks (spells). Today is July 9, 1997.

Interviewee: Mr. Kramer, Szyja. Rio de Janeiro, state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

What is your name?

Szyja Kramer. Szyja. (He spells). Called Chiale Kramer.

Do you have a Hebrew name?

Iehosua. I tai vuf shin ain (letters spelled in Hebrew). In Portuguese, it would be, Josué.

Date of birth?

October 10, 1925. I turned 71.

In what city were you born?

Ostrowiec, Poland.

There was a factory in the city with many workers. We went to work there during the war. Before the war, there were 11,000 Jews in the city. During the war, there were 16,000 because they came from other cities.

The relationship between Jews and non-Jews was not very good because anti-Semitism was strong. We could feel it at school. Saturday, for instance, we did not go to school. When I had to know the homework assigned on Saturday for Monday, I had to go to a non-Jewish classmate. And they mocked us, offered pork knowing we could not eat it. But it was not only that, but there were also other things...

For instance, in sports competition. There was a soccer match between a Jewish team, Maccabi, Against a team of the army, of riflemen. The Jewish team won, one-nil, and we had to run away because they wanted to hit us. The Jews did not react. We had to run away because they started to throw stones.

There were even more serious things. Once I complained to a teacher that a non-Jewish was messing with me, and he just said, “go back to your place”.

The same happened among the adults, they did not get along well.

What was your father's name?

David Kramer. He was also born in Ostrowiec, Poland. He traded feathers for the making of comforters. Goose feather. In the winter, we traded skins, particularly from foxes, wolves and rabbits to make overcoats. My grandfather, his father, had this business and it passed on to his son. I was not old enough for that.

How about your mother?

My mother was a housewife, her name was Raya Sura Kramer. She was a homemaker.

Was your father a religious man? Was yours a religious household? How was your family?

My father was a religious man. My household was very religious. I recall that Friday evening a non-Jewish person always came to turn off the light, because we could not do it ourselves. I was about 10 years old, just a kid. And also to light the fire. We needed someone non-Jewish because on Saturday we could not light the fire.

On Saturdays, all the children had to be home when my father made the Kiddush. Everybody had to sit around the table, together, very respectfully. It was like that in all celebrations, Pessach, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur... No one was excused. And there is more, we went to the synagogue every first day of the month, Rosh Chodesh, because there was a special Chazan, who blessed the new month. I remember that my mother always went because she liked the Chazan a lot, he was a very good singer. His family name was Milnitzky, I don't recall his first name.

My father did not go to the same synagogue. He went to a Hassidic shtibl¹. Each group had their place for the prayers.

The city of Ostrowiec had everything. There were 11 thousand inhabitants and there were relief organizations, called "Bikur Cholim", people who visited the sick, who helped the poor and orphans with the trousseau when they were getting married. They were people concerned with helping others. I remember this because I was already 12 years old.

Did you go to the shtibl with your father?

Yes, I had to go. It was different from the synagogue. The synagogue was for everybody; the shtibl was only for those who followed that "rebe"... It was the Kuzme shtibl, the name of the city, in Polish, was Kajumesh. There were many shtibl, and there were also people who did not go to one, they had a different belief, but it was their point of view...

How about the school? What can you tell us about the school?

The school was public. I had to walk 3 or 4 kilometers to get there. It was not far, because in small cities schools were farther out from downtown. We studied with non-Jewish classmates. There was also the Agudah school and the Talmud Torah...

I attended the *heder*², a Yiddish school. In the morning I went to the public school, and after lunch to the *heder*, where I stayed until early evening... The public school was not too bad, but, at times, there was a scuffle between Jew and non-Jews. It was not exactly a persecution, but it was annoying.

¹ Shtibl, in Yiddish, mean little house; it was a sort of room used for people to meet and pray, different from a consecrated synagogue.

² The Heder, in Yiddish, was a religious school for children where the basics of Judaism were taught.

Why did they do it?

This was something that passed from father to son, from much before my time. It was something ingrained.

My father was very religious. He would pray every morning and at mealtime. He washed his hands, made the prayers after eating, thanked God... There was a prayer for each type of food, for the potatoes, there was the blessing for the land; for the fruits there was a *brachah* (blessing) for the trees that bear the fruits.

The *heder* where I studied was very strict. During the week, we had to learn and on Saturdays we had to show what we had learned during the week. Whenever one knew the answers, he got candies. (He laughs).

How about a bar-mitzva? Did you have one?

My bar-mitzva was already during the war. There was no party, we only had the mikveh, the ritual bath, and received a long white shirt (he laughs). At that moment, we were already responsible for what we did. Because at age 13, you knew what you should and should not do. But that was it. My father bought a box of cigarettes to offer the adults. I remember a box with 100 cigarettes, that was the party. The rabbi was **Rabbi Yechezkel Halstock**. There was no rabbi at the shtibl, they were all Hassidim.

Did you have siblings?

I did. I was the youngest, we were nine children. Some had already come to Brazil, they were already living here. My oldest sister came to Brazil When I was 1 year old. Another brother got married and went to live in the capital, Warsaw. Then, this sister who came to Brazil sent for another sister and another brother. Later, another brother and another sister came. When I arrived in Brazil, I had three sisters and two brothers here.

They left Poland because there was no future, there. There were no jobs, or even the possibility of trading... And because my sister had a good life in Brazil, the other brothers and sisters came. The last brother to travel came in 1937.

My parents were sad because my brothers and sisters were in Brazil. They did not come because They thought this was not a place for religious people to live.

I remember that When we received letters from my siblings, my parents called them “papire kinder”, “paper children”, because they could only know about their children through the letters.

Did they have help from their children?

My brothers always sent Money from Brazil to Poland because the situation was not good. This continued until the beginning of the war.

How old were you when the war broke out?

When the war broke out I was 14 years old. I was happy because I was going to see a real war. I liked war films. Every Sunday morning, at the matinée, there was a war film. But a little while later, six or seven months, I saw what war was really like. From six in the evening until morning, for example, nobody could be on the street. They, the Germans, killed whoever came out to the streets.

Did it take long for the Germans to enter the city?

The war broke out on September 1st, 1939, Friday. I remember the day. On Thursday night three tanks entered. They waited to see if anyone was firing and on the next day tanks came from all sides, surrounding the city. They entered and pasted on walls, in Polish and German, notices that anyone going out at night would be killed.

Immediately the forced labor began. My father had his beard pulled out. He had the long beard of a religious man. He decided to consult the rabbi. When he returned home, he put the beard in an envelope and stored it in the armoire. When he died, we were to put the beard in his tomb.

What did you feel when they started to enter?

I was afraid. Too afraid. The shops closed and we could not buy anything. They grabbed people for forced labor, to clean and wash their quarters. And they beat those whose face they did not like. They beat for no reason. This was in the beginning. We had nowhere to run because Poland was entirely occupied. Only Warsaw, the capital, resisted for a month. Then They bombed the city, many people died, many buildings were destroyed. When the city surrendered, then this was it... Because while the capital did not surrender, it was as if Poland was not occupied by the Germans.

Then there was the forced labor. Each labor Federation had to deliver a number of workers every day. I did not work at the time because I was not old enough, they did not take people under 18 years old.

There was a factory in the city that manufactured train wagons, and they took workers there. In the beginning of the war, those who had a place to work were not taken for forced labor.

So that nothing would happen to me, my family forged my working papers even though I was only 16 years old. They made the document say I was 18, because [the factory] only accepted workers above 18.

When the deportations began, nobody knew what they were. They spoke of Treblinka, but nobody knew what Treblinka was, Oswiecim. They said they were killing in those places, but nobody could believe it. How could there be crematoria and gas chambers? The idea they could be killing like that never entered our heads. But in 1942, in the same year I was accepted to work at the factory, they surrounded the city; it was a Saturday. I worked throughout the night until morning, in what was called the first shift. I noticed that people were whispering one to the other on the streets that something was going to happen. Everybody was whispering. But because I was not old enough, no one would speak too close to me. Then, I told my father: "Father, something is going to happen". And he replied: "Nothing is going to happen; our rabbi is already in heaven, nothing is going to happen in our city".

When it got dark, my mother went to ask a neighbor who had a restaurant patronized by the Gestapo what they were going to do to me. The neighbor said: "let him go because he is working at the factory, so let him go there". I left the house with a piece of challah [Jewish bread] just to work at night and return the next day. When I got to the square, I saw a lot of people, everyone had a suitcase, bags of clothing, and me with just the clothes I was wearing. The city was dark because they had cut off the lights. They cut off everything and we went to the factory.

End of tape 1

Tape 2

Were you at the market where people gathered...

Many already knew, the adults already knew that something was going to happen the following day. I was at the square and they took me to the factory. It was located 3 or 4 kilometers away from the city. When we got there, we heard shots being fired, and it lasted the whole night. None of us knew, but for each shot there was a dead person. The city was surrounded by the Gestapo, who were helped by the Ukrainians, who collaborated with the Germans. We ended up staying in the factory for two weeks, without going back to the city. This was in 1942.

And before that? How was it in the city between 1939 and 1942?

We had to give our contribution to the Germans through the Judenrat³. This Judenrat ran the city even before the war. The Germans did not have to collect the money individually from each one, they collected it through the Judenrat, which also delivered workers to work in occupied places, cleaning, carrying. I was already registered at the factory. When we came back, after the two weeks away from the city, bodies were still being collected. (Laks stops him.)

And before that, until 1942?

We did not have a normal life because the city was occupied by a foreign army, the German army. They ordered how many workers should be delivered... This was in the beginning of the war. The Polish people did not behave well. Most of them lived outside the city, and most of the Jews lived in the city. Because the non-Jews had houses with gardens, they had crops, and they lived close to where they worked, farming, and most Jews could not have crops. Very few had. Most would buy the produce. The farmers delivered produce twice a week, Mondays and Thursdays, which were market days. They brought wheat and all sorts of produce to sell. Trading wise, they did not behave badly, but later on, they had to deliver to the German army a set amount of food, fruits. This was from 1940 to 1941.

In 41, it was more or less the same thing. They started to move people who were not downtown into town. And the Jews had their space reduced. They occupied the homes that belonged to the Jews. In time, they made a ghetto that had few streets. After the deportation to Treblinka, in 1942, they made three roads around the cemetery. That was in the ghetto. When we returned from the factory, two weeks later, it was now the ghetto. My old house was near that ghetto and I went over to see it. There was already a non-Jewish family living there. The new lady of the house even said, 'you can take what you want.' But I didn't take anything, I only thought there might still be someone left alive, someone who could have hidden, but there was nobody left.

You had mentioned something about bodies, can you expand on that?

It was on the night when each shot killed a person. When we arrived, we helped to carry the bodies. The ghetto was close to the cemetery...

I remember, now that we are talking about it, that it was about this time that, in 1940, we made the burial of the synagogue's Sefer Torah. They reached the conclusion that we should bury it because the Germans burned and ripped what was most sacred to us. They did it to demean us, our most sacred objects were garbage to them. And for religious people, that was something very serious. I

³ Judenrat, is the German word for Jewish Council. It was an administrative body the Germans demanded that the Jews organized at each ghetto of the federal government (the central area of occupied Poland). These management bodies governed the ghettos and were the intermediaries between the Jewish community and the Nazis. They had to supply Jews for slave labor and assist the deportation of Jews to extermination camps during the Holocaust. Those who refused to follow Nazi orders were murdered or deported to the extermination camps.

was working at night and, when I came from work in the morning, they needed a minyan for the prayer. We put all Sefer Torah together and buried them in the cemetery. We lit black candles, each one said a Kaddish... After the war, I did not meet anyone who had attended the Sefer Torah burial.

After collecting the bodies, what did you do?

I went to the factory, to work. There was no one else from my family, only a sister... But those who did not have a place to work, who did not have working papers, would be taken to a city called Sandomierz, because they could live normally there, even if they did not have a regular job. This sister of mine went there because there was no work in Ostrowiec. What happened was that, later on, they gathered all these people who did not have work and took them to Treblinka.

Around this time you heard of Auschwitz, Oswiecim in Polish. And nobody believed it. They said it was the place where they put people in a gas chamber and then burned the bodies. But nobody believed it, it didn't enter our heads. Now, after so many years, everybody is used to it, that they beat, killed and put people in gas chambers.... But at first, nobody believed. How is it they could kill so many people for no reason, just because they were Jewish?

We remained in the ghetto. Afterwards they laid me off at the factory. I became illegal. In the beginning of 1943, we lived in the ghetto and they built lodgings near the factory, for those who worked there. They were going to liquidate the ghetto.

But, before that, didn't you go somewhere else? Or did you go straight to the ghetto? Didn't you go somewhere else?

(Kramer recalls a fact). "Ah yes, I went to Belzec. In 1941, it was before the ghetto and I still lived at home and my parents were still alive. At the Judenrat they mentioned there was going to be a talk for those curious enough to listen; they didn't say what it was. When we got there, we were rounded up, taken to the train station and to Lublin. There, we were taken to 7 Lipova Street. We stayed there for a little while, and then they sent us to Belzec. It was not a camp, it was a place from where they sent workers wherever they needed laborers. In Belzec we dug holes and built roadways, we had a cart and shovel. We did not stay long there.

Belzec was not a camp as Auschwitz. In the lodgings we slept, there was no bed or bunkbeds, nothing, we slept on the floor. Later, Belzec turned into an extermination camp, but when I was there, we had only to dig and fix the road. I don't know what this work was for, but they were not yet building the extermination camp.

So we went on foot to Plazuf (?), 17 kilometers away. There was the border between Germany and Russia, because at that time war had not been declared. We made trenches. There was a Nazi in this place, his name was Dolf, who was always riding his horse. He was a German, a Nazi, and had a gun. He got there, he beat whomever he did not like, for no reason, and then he left.

A plaque on the barbed wire indicated that we were in em Plazuf (?), 70 kilometers away from Lviv. The lodging was probably a synagogue, because there was a mezuzah for each room. We stayed there until November of 1941. Then, they let a group go, and my sister went over to see if she could get me out. They let me go and I went back home, because my parents were still living in Ostrowiec. It was something sudden, but many remained there. I don't know what happened with those who stayed. What I know is that when we arrived, people looked at us as if we were coming from outer space. I was 16 years old. In that year, they made me working papers stating I was 18, and I was registered at the factory as a worker. That is how I could avoid being deported to Treblinka that Saturday evening.

Were your parents deported?

My parents were there. My father entered the train, but because there was no place for everybody in the wagons, those who did not fit were taken to the soccer stadium. My mother did not enter the same wagon. People like my mother waited for transportation from Sunday until Wednesday. They stayed outdoors, in the rain or under the sun, no food, no anything. The stadium was surrounded by Nazis and Ukrainians. This hurts me, it hurt me more at that time; had she gone with my father, she would be dead the next day. But these four days... (he cries, stops). Then, they took... (he cries, stops). A second transportation there. (he cries). Then they took the train... I was at the factory for these two weeks, we did not know what was going on.

We knew that they stayed until Wednesday and went on the second transportation to where the first transportation had gone.

And where did they go?

Treblinka. Then I went back to my daily work at the factory until 1943, when I lost my job, I was taken out of the factory and became illegal. This is when they made a roll call aloud, to separate those who were working from those who were not. Those who did not have a job would be sent to Sandomierz; this has happened to my sister. As many worked alternating shifts at the factory, some people that were called were not present. I remember they called the name Rosenberg, and I presented myself. I saw he wasn't there and I said, 'I'm here.' Since no one came forward, I became Rosenberg. There was someone, a foreman, who said: "you are not Rosenberg". At each name unanswered, I would present myself. Until a woman from the police said, "let him go". They pitied me. That is how I entered the factory and was saved from being sent to another city. And remained in Ostrowiec.

When the ghetto was liquidated, in 1943 I remained in Ostrowiec, at the factory dorms, big barracks, 400 in each of the oversized barracks, triple bunk beds. And there I stayed until June of '44, when they took us to Auschwitz.

How was the arrival at Auschwitz? Did you know where you were going?

We did not. When we arrived, the train remained parked all night. We remained inside. Later we came to know that on that night we were going to a camp that had 2 thousand gypsies. These gypsies were taken to the crematorium, and we were settled in their lodgings.

Upon our arrival, first we were registered. And given this number on the arm. Hundred and five thousand. It was in 1944, in June. Each one had to sign, and I remember they gave us a red triangle...

We signed a paper stating that we were communists. I don't know, but I guess they wanted to protect themselves for after the war, by saying that they had only killed communists. I didn't even know what a communist was then... And they gave us the striped uniform. The number on the arm was also on the lapel (he points to the shirt pocket), and we also had the red triangle. We signed a lot of papers. I don't know why we had to sign so many papers in order to die, No one knew if they were going to survive, to save themselves. Then I saw, close to the barbed wire, close to our barrack, some small barracks that made up a hospital. There were people there early in the morning, and I asked to a man, 'What work is done here?' He told me, 'Nobody works here; here you are burned to death'. We thought he was crazy, that he had been there for a long time and went mad. "What do you mean, nobody works here?" "Can't you smell it?" he answered. "Are you nuts?" I asked.

Unfortunately, right away, we found out it really was a crematorium." We stayed at that camp for two weeks.

End of tape 2

Tape 3

What did you feel when you knew people were burned there?

I can't explain the feeling. Even not believing in what the man said, when he said "feel the smell of burned flesh". But when we left there and passed by the crematorium, which was covered with blankets for us not to see what was there, we could see many bodies, through slits in the blankets. Then we realized he was not crazy, he was telling the truth. This happened in a passageway leaving the gypsy field for Buna⁴.

We stayed in the gypsy field for two weeks. During that time, Jews from Lodz arrived. They were wearing those black overcoats, like the ones religious people wear. From there we went to Buna, six kilometers away. I was on block 4. Who took care of these blocks were Polish criminals who had been convicted before the war. They were in charge of running the camp, and only once in a while a Nazi came to check. But the camp operations were run by Polish criminals. There were also prisoners who were German, wearing the green triangle showing they were criminals; either they had killed someone or were prisoners before the war. The Nazis used them to run the camps because they knew they were cold, bloodthirsty. For them, killing a person meant nothing.

What did these Germans do?

They took care of the camp, they were kapos⁵. We arrived in Buna, it was the same type of camp as Auschwitz. I was taken there with the same group that had come from Ostrowiec to Auschwitz. And we thanked God we were leaving. Not because we thought we were going to be saved, but because what happened to others, who were taken to crematoriums, did not happen to us. Leaving there could even be worse to us, but we wanted to. There, we saw death.

We arrived at Buna in the same month, June or July. It was six kilometers away from Auschwitz, and there were camps all around. There was Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II, they were all connected to Auschwitz.

When we arrived there, there were different types of work. I worked in construction... I don't know what they did with these constructions. We carried bricks, sand, helped building. Then I was chosen, together with 20 other guys, to deactivate bombs that had been thrown over Buna. These were bombs that had not detonated. It was dangerous because they could explode with time. The good thing is that at least I could eat, because this group was connected to the air force. We surrounded the bomb, each group of five; we placed a rope around it and waited until the air force officer arrived. He was the one who opened the exploding device. That was dangerous. Then we went to the back of the camp, behind the factory, dug a hole, placed a wire and hopped on a jeep to go far away from that place. The bomb was then detonated. Each bomb weighted 250 lbs., about 125 kilos. It was written in English. I don't know if they were British or American bombs.

Why did they bomb this place?

I don't know what they manufactured there, but it should be very important. Because they did not bomb Auschwitz, for instance, and would save far more people. If they bombed the crematorium, it would take time to rebuild and many more people would survive.

⁴ Buna was the Auschwitz III Monowitz camp, also known as Buna-Monowitz. It was a huge Chemical complex built by IG-Farben corporation. All the 15 thousand prisoners of the camp worked as slaves to prepare a synthetic rubber facility.

⁵ A prisoner assigned to supervise other prisoners in Nazi extermination camps.

Before bombing Buna, the factory, leaflets were dropped from a plane with the information of the date and time that we had to be distant from the factory. The problem was that we could not leave the factory, we were taken there.

When the bombing occurred, the sky was filled with airplanes. The kapos took us into hiding. We realized that at least there was some reaction, something was being done. None of us died in this bombing, but it was right at the time stated in the leaflets.

On January 18, 1945 Auschwitz was liquidated. We went on foot to Gleiwitz. The Russians were moving forward and took everybody out of the camp. Those who stayed at the Auschwitz hospital were liberated two days later by the Russians. We were taken to the middle of Germany.

We arrived in Gleiwitz and spent the night. In the morning, they took us to the train station. They opened the wagon, it had no ceiling, it was a cargo wagon. It was filled up, crowded, and many people were left outside. Then a Gestapo man took out a gun and fired into the air. People moved and room was created for the rest to go in. We were 170 people in the wagon.

We left to go to **Bygdoszcz (?)**. We were going to Czechoslovakia, to a factory there. But the wagon was so crowded that when someone left the position he was in, meaning he was no longer stuck in the crowd, he was carried over the heads of others. It was being stuck in the crowd that held us together. Then, some pushed to one direction, some to the other, and the guy, who was not yet dead, was thrown out of the wagon. The Germans saw us throwing him out, but they did not want the people from Czechoslovakia to see dead people. So, they stopped the train outside the city and told everybody to leave the wagons. The thin ones were shot. They did it on all wagons.

We were on our way to Oranienburg, close to Berlin. From Auschwitz we passed by Czechoslovakia, there was no **Bygdoszcz (?)**. The German army was retreating, running away. This is why they took us, Himmler had ordered it: when they left any camp or had to retreat, they could not leave anyone alive, they either had to kill or take with them. So they took us, and we went like that for 10 days.

When we reached Oranienburg, the wagons were not so crowded because of the people who were thrown out of the wagons, those who were killed. Instead of having a sort of a step to help people exit the wagon, because the door is high, when people left they fell and remained lying on the floor, too weak, one on top of the other. We left, but had no place to put our feet, and we were starving, after 10 days... When we traveled by train, each one could take a blanket. We ate the snow that fell on the blanket. We had just received a piece of bread upon leaving Auschwitz. It did not last long, because we were hungry. I still saved some of mine for a while. So we ate the snow. The snow ended and I did not hear my voice any longer, I had lost it...I lost my voice because the snow was cold, it was ice. In time, my voice returned. No one had their throat slit, it was of hunger and not eating.

When we reached Oranienburg, they took us to take a shower, but there was no towel, no soap, nothing, only to make us miserable. The shower was large, and we stayed for like half an hour under it. From there we were sent to Flossenbürg. The camp in Oranienburg was large, **Henckelberg (?)**, was there, an airplane factory, but we did not see any airplane or anything. We were there for a few days. Kapos ran the camp. There were already people there, but we had no contact with anyone.

We arrived in Flossenbürg by train... The camp was at an altitude of 900 meters. There was no labor, they only counted us many times a day, in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening...

The camp was divided in blocks, with triple bunkbeds. There was no labor. It was there that the kapos killed to steal our bread ration. They would take four or five people in the lavatories and use a hose and cold water. Everybody was so thin from not eating for so long, they would end up falling and dying. The kapos would steal the bread and margarine they had.

In Flossenbürg we were taken to the quarantine. In the quarantine, because I looked younger, I was given the soup leftovers. They gave it to the minors. But I was already of age, and a guy denounced me. A kapo named Karol came over to the table, stripped me of my pants and whipped me 25 times. There was one pulling my legs down and another one holding me. After the 10th lash, I did not feel anything. When it was over, I fell on the floor as if I was a shaking spring. "I was left where I lay and they carried me like a piece of uncured leather, a skin".

My bed was the top one of the triple bunkbed, but I had to switch because my wounds were black, and I was in pain... This was done so that I could get out of bed immediately after the wakeup call. With the confusion and the wounds, had I remained in the top bed I would not be able to get out.

(He remembers another fact) Ah, Leon Blum was in a barrack there. Someone called out "Leon Blum", and I didn't know who he was, but he was a Jew and had been France's prime minister. Then, they took some of us to light a fireplace. I carried the wood, received a piece of bread and went down the mountain to the train. There were five of us, and we walked close to one another, two on one side, two on the other and one in the middle, so that the Gestapo did not notice one of us had problems walking. They hit with a rifle people who walked slow.

When we got there, there were 50 in each wagon. They changed our clothes, we returned the striped uniform and they gave us civilian clothes. When the train stopped, we had reached Leonburg, close to Stuttgart.

In Flossenbürg they marked our foreheads with numbers, one to three, to show each one's capacity. It was the kapos themselves who did it. I know that "three" meant good, and I was one of those who were still good for something. Because if I were not, they were going to kill me. They used a blue marker on the forehead. From there, everywhere I went, I only thought "I must leave here. I don't know if it is going to be worse elsewhere, but I have to leave here".

We left Flossenbürg. They needed blacksmiths, and I registered myself to leave that place. We arrived at Leonburg, close to Stuttgart. I had a fever, a high fever.

How was it in Leonburg?

It wasn't bad. We stayed there for a little while, there was no labor. They kept counting us. I recall once I could not remain standing up during the count. I ended up sitting on the floor. Luckily I was not taken to a hospital. Because I had a 102° fever, but the man who wrote it down remembered me from Ostrowiec and registered 92° because the hospital was not actually a hospital; there was no medicine, no anything. If you improved by yourself, fine, if you got worse, you could die. And I had dysentery, I could not drink water... I even drank water from the lavatory, which was even worse, but God wanted me saved. We stayed there for a little while. From January until the end (of the war) we passed by five camps.

Why?

Why? (he laughs, ironically). They took us, but not to work. From Leonburg, they took us to Meldorf, close to Munich. Who ran everything was the Gestapo. There were no civilians to run things. The Nazis and the kapos were in charge of us.

We arrived in Meldorf, the only type of work was going into the forest to collect wood for the kitchen. The Romanians were in charge of Meldorf. Nazi Romanians in German uniform. There was no one who could talk to them. They only spoke Hungarian, Romanian. I found a person from the Judenrat, Radom. He heard me speaking Yiddish and started to treat me like a son. He had been there for a long time and gave me bread. He was not a kapo, he was a nice person and had been there for a long time already. Our work was to go to the forest to collect wood. Then they took us to Munich.

There was no work in Meldorf. When they thought there was going to be a bombing, they shouted, as if to children, "go hide, go hide in the basement!". But there was no bombing. It was not like Auschwitz, but I cannot say it was good, because there is no place where you are a prisoner and cannot leave that is good.

We went to the station, 6 kilometers away, on foot. From there we went to Munich. Why Munich? Because the Americans had bombed the Munich train station and the tracks were dislodged. They took us there to fix them. I found a piece of meat and I kept it all day because it made me salivate. I kept it until the next day. I'm just remembering it now, I had forgotten it for so long.

This was in April. From there, we took a train; they told us they were going to take us to the Tyrol, where there was a crematorium. They said a crematorium was being built in the Tyrol, in the Alps, in Bavaria. This was the rumor amidst us, I don't know if it was true or not. These were whispers.

The train journey took four days. On April 25 or 26, 1945 we saw houses with white flags hanging, as if they had surrendered. One house had it hanging, another did not. On the second or third day, we saw soldiers shouting "Friede, friede", which meant peace and that the war was over. We started to run out of the train, for joy. There was shouting. The Germans who were returning on the pathway, wearing uniforms and backpacks were shouting peace. There were Gestapo men on the same train, and they had provisions in their wagon. We ran over and took the food, they had salty cheese. Then, an order came from the Gestapo that the war wasn't over and they were going to have a "second front". That is how they named it: "second front". Because we had to run out of the wagons, the Gestapo shot us with machine guns and killed more than 300 people. The German soldiers announced on the radio that the war was over. Then, came the news that the war was not over, and they were going to open a second front. In the meantime, they killed, the Gestapo killed many of us.

End of tape 3

Tape 4

Please, tell us this episode again. What happened when the Germans said that the war was over?

There were German soldiers coming on the pathway by where the train had stopped. They shouted "Friede, the war is over, now we have peace". Then we all started to run. The wagons were open, we were happy because the war was over. It was when an order came from the Gestapo, from the Joint Staff, that the war was not over, and they were going to open another front. Then they started to shoot us, the prisoners who had run out of the wagons shouting that the war was over. Many died, those who survived were locked again in the wagons.

Before that, we had run to the wagons because we were hungry, and we knew the Gestapo had a wagon for themselves and supplies. We grabbed whatever we found before us. I got cheese, but it

was too salty! When they put us back on the wagons, they closed the doors. Unbearable heat and thirst... “Thankfully, God sent us rain. Since the walls of the cars were made of horizontal planks, we stayed to the side because the water ran off and we caught the drops to drink, all the time. Then, the train stopped. A locomotive with a *Jeunes de Marie* (?) came, and he said “no one should run, nothing is going to happen because the war is over”.

This was between April 30th and May 1st. They took us to Tutzing, where the HitlerJung⁶ stayed. In Tutzing, they brought us a cauldron with soup. That was our first soup after many years. The German civilians of the city prepared the soup. Then we were taken to Feldafing. Tutzing and Feldafing are very close. Who took us were these *Jeunes de Marie* (?), all Germans. When we arrived at Feldafing, we were lodged in groups of 8 or 9 per room. The rooms were big because they belonged to the Nazis, the HitlerJung. We were taken there by women, sisters, hospital attendants. At night we would shout. No one believed we were free. Then, the next day... (stops)

(He remembers a fact) At the train, before we left Tutzing, we saw tanks on the road. “Tanks? Are they back?”, we thought. Because we did not see Germans any longer. Then someone shouted they were not German, they were American tanks! When someone said they were American, we started to run. We ran up to the road. There was the railway, the fields and then the road. There was one who spoke English and explained who we were. So they started to throw Red Cross packages to us, packages with food, American cigarettes, cookies, chocolate. It became a problem! Most of us were too frail, and many people started to die after eating. We had to eat light, because our stomach was too dry.

Then, a chaplain came, wearing an American uniform. He spoke to us in English: “no one has to run anywhere; we have liberated you”. Then, he asked: “who was here and behaved poorly to you?” We pointed to a Nazi who had hit us with a rifle.

The officer took two of us in a jeep, as witnesses. The Nazi was digging alone, he had to, and for us that was revenge. They killed him. The tankers had orders to occupy more territories in Bavaria. This was close to Munich, in Feldafing.

What was the reaction in your group?

I cannot express how happy we were. We remained in Feldafing for a few months. Then I went to Munich, so that I did not have to be supported by the Joint⁷.

I did not go to a refugee camp, only in Feldafing and then we went to Munich. In Munich, there was an apartment that had belonged to a Nazi, and we had the right to occupy it. I stayed there along with three friends, the same who left Ostrowiec together, we were all the same age. I have contact with one of them until today, we speak on the phone on Rosh Hashana...

After Munich, life became more normal. I gave my name to the Red Cross, because those who had relatives gave their names. I had a sister in Brazil, but did not know the address. Those who had survived gave their names and the city they were from, and this information was sent worldwide. So, here in Brazil they knew I had survived, and I started to receive letters...

⁶ HitlerJunge can be translated as “Hitler’s Youths”, a term that was used in the 1920s and 1930s to any youth who belonged to that group; the adults of the group were called Hitlerjugendführer..

⁷ Joint is short for “American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee”. It is an important Jewish relief organization that operates on an international level. It was created in 1914 and is kept by the American community.

How about your parents and your sisters?

I knew there was no one. I knew They had died and there was no hope of finding anyone. I stayed two more years one in Germany and one in France. **In 1946, my brothers sent for me to come to Brazil, but immigration was closed, and they didn't let me enter.**

Because you were a Jew?

I don't know. At that time, the president was Dutra or Getúlio, I don't remember, it was 1946. I stayed one year in France, from October 1946 until October 1947. I was in Paris. I went to school three times a week, the École Berlitz, and the Joint, which was a philanthropic organization, paid the hotel. Then, when they came to know that Brazil was closed, they told me I had to find a place to live, I would have to leave France. Then a friend and I prepared a good, cheap itinerary. I did not come to Brazil as a permanent resident, because the country was closed. I came as a tourist, on my way to Bolivia. I came "via Brazil". I was not a citizen, I was not Polish, I was a stateless person. I received a tourist visa to go to Bolivia via Brazil. When I arrived here, my brother owned a store, he had assets, he vouched for my staying here to live. I don't know how he did it, but 50 years has passed.

I lived with my sister until I married. I worked as a street peddler. What a difference I saw here in Brazil! My nieces and nephews always studied with non-Jewish classmates. They were like siblings. I even envied them, because in Poland, when I went over to a classmate's home to get the homework Saturday Evening, they mocked me, "eat some pork", they offered. They knew it was forbidden, particularly because my father was a religious man. I would never eat pork.

It was quite different here, because Brazil accepted us as if we were Brazilians. It was like night and day. To this day, thanks be to God, I never experienced anti-Semitism, I never felt it.

I like it here a lot. I married and raised my family, I have two daughters and three grandchildren. I did not remember any of my brothers. When I got out of the ship, I did not believe... I knew I had brothers, but when you see them, it is different. I arrived in 1947, went to live with my sister and had two nephews a little younger than I was. We lived together as three brothers. The past is like a black page, many pages in fact, not only one.

My wife arrived... She had been in Brazil for a year and a Half. We dated, married, have three grandchildren...

I have two daughters. One is a professor, the other works at White Martins, and is quite well off. I have grandchildren, one goes to the university.

Would you like to add anything?

I forgot one thing. About a man who was the principal of a Haguidah, a religious school. This was in Ostrowiec. When the Germans arrived, they closed the schools, particularly the Jewish ones. Then there was this principal. He would go from home to home, teaching, he was very sedulous. He taught all day long. He came to my home at the end of the day, already tired from so much work. In order not to fall asleep, he would put cold water in a pan to wet his face, in wintertime. He would wet his face in order not to sleep.

He taught so the students would not stop studying, despite the sacrifice. Despite deaths, hunger, the war, "one must continue to study".

Did he survive?

No. He hid during the first deportation. In the second, they found where he was hiding. He was wearing his tallit, he had the tefillin on. He ran yelling "Shema Israel". Maurer was his name. He was a Hassid, deeply religious.

This was in 1942, when there was deportation. He was in hiding and that was the second time they deported people.

If I recall much, I will need to be here for hours.

Is there anything else you remember?

Ah, there is so much, but I cannot speak right now... (he cries).

Enough... (he cries)

Is there a message you would like to pass?

That it never happens again. (He cries). I can't talk anymore...

We thank you for your testimony, your moving testimony. Thank you very much.