

Rose Zemelman Testimony Transcript

My name is Rose Zemelman. I was born in Poland. Sosnowiec was the city where I lived. I got my parents. My parent's name is - my father's name is Israel Leib Weiss and my mother's name was Esther Wiess. I got - we was three sisters. My sister, the oldest, was Frania Weiss Leskowicz. She was married and they got a little baby when I left - six years old, Abramov Leskowicz. And then my middle sister, her name is Ida Bengis Weiss. This is my only sister what I got left in this world. And I was the youngest.

It started in home. I got the best home and the best parents in the whole wide world. What we got is just plain love. And they raised us - the better kids you couldn't have. And they gave us everything. They said, "If you are good, you will have everything in the world." And we was so proud. We gave them so much, so much love and we got in return. And we wasn't rich, but we got everything. We got two, two rooms - this was everything. We got nice furniture, very nice furniture, was a little bit not, but we was very happy in one world. A very happy family - full of love.

And they raised us good and we got everything until one day, my mother went out. I was with my mother home. My sisters both wasn't home. And my mother came in in a few minutes and she said, "Rose, you know what? Take the window and go out." I said, "Mom, why I have to do this?" And she said, "Rose, please go through the window." We was living on the downstairs. And I went what mother said. So, I went with one leg I was outside the window, and the second - the second I went to put through, somebody holds me. I turned out and it was the Nazi. When they took all the teenagers from everywhere - not just me. But my mother heard what is going on and she came in and she said, "Rose, go to the window." "Ok."

Well, they took me in a place where they took everybody. And we had to stay a whole night - a whole day and a whole night until my parents came next week, next day, excuse me. Next day they came and they came to say goodbye, because they find out that they are going to send us out. They didn't know where. And I never forget my father's tears, because he couldn't, he couldn't talk and I couldn't talk either and then my mom. And I feel always the tears on my face. Always. I never lose this.

They send me in three camps. The first one... This was working camps. This was the first was Bolkenheim. It was 24 girls of the teenagers. And we would send on a field like to tear out vegetables. We was very happy because we could outside eat. And we eat with the dirt, I mean, you know. We didn't wash or something like this. And, also, they allowed us to take to the when we was through with the work, we went and took the things in. So, we had to - we had to eat. But we got food there too, because that was the work what we did. We got in the morning some bread - plain piece of bread and when we came home in the, like 6:00 - then we

got a soup. And that's it. We got a lady – a German lady - and she took care of us. She was very nice to us. And this was the life in the working camp.

Then from there we wasn't, we wasn't long. I don't remember exactly how long I was there. They send us to Waldenberg. This is in Germany. And we got, we got work – the same thing. A little lady, a old lady – I called her grandma, because she was a German – and she was, to me, like a mother. She brought me food. She gave me that I got to eat when she is not there. And I was happy that they took me to work, because to stay inside, it was brought me so many memories. My mother, my father, my family and everything. Where they are, where they disappear.

The third camp, work camp, was Graben. And in Graben my sister, Ida Bengis, she was over there. And they sent me from the second *lager*, camp I mean, they sent me to Graben where my sister was. I had a beautiful voice when I was young. And the girls knew it that I knew a lot of Polish and a lot of Jewish songs. So when was so, you know, we talking about the parents, the whole wide world. What is going on? Why we are here? We's questioning when? Why? What we did so wrong that they are punishing. But we didn't have an answer. And the girls always, before we went to sleep, no even we was in the beds... Not beds, you know, the wooden – the wooden beds, I don't know how they called them. And the girls always said, "Rose, sing something from home." And they always want *Mein Yiddishe Momme*. Then what can I tell you? We all cried. And I sang. And the German, the German lady what took care of us had a mother – she told me this after the song – that her mother because she came... The lady always, – the Nazi lady always - but she was very nice to us... She always came to control our, are we in the beds. We supposed to be in the beds. We could sing. We could talk – everything. So I was singing *The Yiddishe Momme* and everybody's crying. And when I, when I finish, suddenly I see the German lady is coming to me. And she said, "Rosa." They called in German, Rosa. Here is Rose. So she said, "Why you singing this?" I said, "What do you think why I singing this? The girls are just crying for their families and me too. And I can sing, so I want to give them at least this." So, she said, "You know Rose..." And she's crying with me, the German lady. She said, "My mother died before, a week before the war started." And that's why, and she always wanted me to sing Jewish, Jewish songs because of this. So, we got very good. And this was the last, the last working camp.

And from Graben, me, I was together with my sister, and they sent us to Bergen-Belsen. They send us to trains packed like hell. We didn't know where we going. It was, I think, in the wintertime or after, after. I don't remember exactly. It's so many years. So, we went down and we walked and we was just wearing the, the coat. Our coat was blue stripes and gray stripes. And on the left side was a Jewish star – a yellow star. So, and they gave us shoes, I never forget, what they wear in Holland with the points up – wood. We couldn't walk. We couldn't do nothing.

Well, then finally we come in to Bergen-Belsen. This, this is the concentration camp where I was three months there without a piece of bread, without water, no toilets. On the right side of the floor, the girls were laying down. And the other side – the same, the same way. The middle, what was empty, was like mountains, you know, who died. Then they put it in the middle until you got to the ceiling. You got a mountain.

Everybody begin to get weak. You couldn't work. It's not work, no nothing. So, no work, no nothing. It's no food. So, you can imagine - no toilet, no food, no nothing. People begin to get so sick. They catch typhus and they needed help. They begin, I... We was four girls. My sister and three girls from Sosnowiec – what we kept together - girlfriends. And I was blessed I think from God, because I could walk from the beginning. But when it got like four, five weeks, then I begin to be, to get so sick. They took us off the hair. We, they stopped menstruations, you know, and they finished everything. We looked... We didn't recognize ourselves. And well, I was blessed because I could crawl like a six months old baby, you know, when begins to crawl. That's why I'm saying that I was lucky, because they needed, every few minute, a little water and I didn't have... from where. But one said, "Rose, please raise me the head." They couldn't do nothing. They got typhus. They got, they... no toilet – everything. The smell when you came in then its... I don't know for us we didn't feel this because we staying there then you are used to but how many... I could crawl. I remember, I went out every night and I took the, excuse me for the expression, the lice what was on us everywhere and I was lucky I could go out the door from the night and others wasn't. Well, I was looking were no bodies there to make sure and I put the lice out. They came back. What do you think they went, but what could you do in the other with the rest of the people. They died like this. They died every day the mountain gets higher and higher and higher. And the sickness and everything and not just in the toilets, so many - it was probably in the, in the, in the barracks. Who knows, thousand or more. It was a long, long barrack and was so many what people was.

One day, it was April 15, 1945, I got free. I saw from the... I said, if it's quiet I can go to the window and see what's going on. I saw it's coming a tank from very, very far straight to our block where our – not block – I mean the concentration camp was. And I saw a white, a white, a piece of wood with a white, white thing, I saw. I didn't know what it is, because it was very far. And I came in into the barrack and I told the girls this - that I see. I don't know what this means and what this is. But I didn't see when they came. I was looking the whole time like I holded a little piece of paper that I can look through what is going on with them. And then I saw soldiers. But I didn't know what soldiers. But I knew it for sure that that's not the Nazis no more. And what closer they came, and they came and stopped by my barrack. They opened the door and we was afraid to death. And they said, they said we free. The England soldiers freed our block. I mean Bergen-Belsen – not just mine block. Bergen-Belsen they freed. And they want to talk to us. Who can talk? Who can talk English? And they brought another one. I said, I said I was what was talking and what was walking and they saw me. They said, "Poor kid. Look this poor kid." Now I know what they said. And they said, they said, "Jewish?" I said,

“Jewish, Jewish.” “You Jewish?” I heard Jewish. I said, “Jewish.” Then they went in the, in the back to look for somebody who can talk something, you know. It was somebody what he was talking I [unclear] to like my daughters. But he got a piece of candy this big and he gave it to me. I said, “Who could eat candy?” Well, but was very nice of him.

They didn’t know what was going on inside. And they was, was, talking to me. Finally, they find a Jewish boy what he could understand everything and talking better than me and he asked me everything and I told him the same thing what they did to us. They said it’s unbelievable. Look that smell. Look how the kids are doing. Everybody got a typhus. No shoes. They wear this, you know from the, from the going out, you know - the bowel movement. I am not ashamed. The bowel movement, the pee and everything – it smelled awful, awful, awful. So, they begin to clean us, to clean us up, to take us from this, from this barrack. And put, they got, they got already plans where to put us.

First, maybe three times a day, we was taking showers – they gave us showers. And I remember they put the white powder – they sprayed us all over three times a day until they, they made us clean. And then they begin to cook to make from our bungalow – a kitchen and they begin to cook for us – fat. Fat stove. And people begin to die, because you’ve got an empty stomach for so long. And they saw that so many people died after then they begin to cook like a little milk with more water, a little wheat. And they begin to gave us for a few weeks until we get used to. And then they begin to cook not fat. They gave us bread. We got everybody took a bread. We were so... We said, “We got bread. Dear God! Oh, we got bread.” And we didn’t touch it and the bread was on the table everyday – fresh bread and was – because we didn’t, we didn’t eat and this was our, our luck that we didn’t eat.

So, finally we begin to eat and they gave us who was families and who was girlfriends with whoever – they knew it from our city, from their city – they gave them places to live. And so little by little, my sister remember that we got an uncle here. In...

[Interviewer: In Kansas...](#)

Yeah in this city. But they don’t live – my mother’s brother. And they came here, oh I don’t know, I was a very young girl. And I said, “You know, Ida, I remember that Kansas City I heard from what they wrote to my mother always from here – from America.” And my sister said, “We are going to the organization – to the Jewish organization – and we will say that we got an uncle. And they, they sent... They found out the city. They find out the address and everything and they wrote to them a letter that they got two nieces what they was in concentration camps in Bergen-Belsen and they... We just want to ask you are you want them. We just went. It was like two weeks – everything – and we was, we was in this country. I came to this country. I will never forget. I kissed the dirt.

Source: Rose Zelman video testimony - <https://mchekc.org/portfolio-posts/zelmanrose/>