

Bertha Gutovitz Testimony Transcript

I'm Bertha Gutovitz. I was born December 22, 19 – December 11, 1922 in Poland in a little town, Białobrzegi, between Warsaw and Radom. And as far as I can remember, we moved to Radom and my father and mother and I had a brother and two little sisters. We, we were a very happy family. My father was a cobbler.

And when I was 16 the war broke out. And we lived in the same apartment for a small time. And then they took us all to the small ghetto. We lived in the ghetto. My mother was selling from the house a little groceries so we can... Anyway it was a very hard life.

One night, we went to sleep. We lived in one room with four children. And one night, we went to sleep and 4:00 in the morning there was a knock on the door and through two Germans came in and told my father, "Get up!" And he got up and he walked only to the doorstep and they gave him six bullets in his mouth. And they left. He was laying right in front of the apartment and they walked about ten, ten feet and they came back. They thought he still alive and they gave him another bullet. So the same night right in the morning - my mother was a very beautiful brunette - this is the same morning, this is unbelievable because I didn't believe at the time. My mother was snow white, grey. And after this it was a very hard time. My mother was laying on – it was, this was in the winter – and my mother was laying evenings night by night and day and picking up the blood with the snow and put it in bottles. What she want to do with this I don't know, but she kept this blood in bottles for days and days in the house, in the apartment.

So after this, we didn't have any more a big support, so she took in some groceries in the house and people from the little ghetto used to come in and buy. And I didn't work because there was no work for young girls, at that time in the ghetto. So it wasn't too much longer my brother was nine years old and he went to work for the Germans in a German hospital. And he was a very strong boy and he was a very good worker. So he... They liked him very much and they gave him some bread and a little some other groceries so he brought home for us. One day, he comes home after quite a few weeks, with a German in uniform. So, the neighbors was scared they gonna take us out and they gonna shoot us too. So I said to him, of course, in my language, in Jewish, "Why did you come with him?" He said, "You gonna go to..." He told them - that German likes him very much - and he told him that he has a sister, that she knows everything, which wasn't true, of course. He played on his sympathy. "And she's beautiful. And she knows how to do this and she know how to do that." So he persuaded this German to come and take me out to the same place where he worked because they knew over there that the same night is gonna be an *aussiedlung*, which means they gonna take people out and then they close down the ghetto.

So he took me to work over there and the same night from, we were fenced in, from the fences we saw hundreds and hundreds of people marching through. I saw my mother and I saw my two sisters. They was, they were walking them to the trains. And they took them to Treblinka, which was a death camp. We didn't know in the beginning what they did with them, but they all went to the gas chamber - my two sisters and my mother. So I was left on this place working with my brother, not knowing at the time what they did with them. We found out later.

Then came - how do you say in English - it came an order that no Jewish people can work in the Germans' casinos or gardens. No Jew should be working there. So they sent us back to the ghetto - my brother and me. And so we were in the ghetto doing practically nothing - going every day for that piece of bread and soup, you know, whatever they gave us to eat. One day they were saying that they gonna take people and send them to Israel. So whoever's gonna get up in the morning and write his name down, so the first who's gonna be picked they gonna be going to Israel. Of course everybody wanted to go to Israel, so we went down and we registered and we stayed in the line.

So what happened to all these people? They took us to Bliżyn, to a concentration camp. They took us to a working camp - to Bliżyn, it was the name. And we worked there and one day - I had a boyfriend - you know, I was 16, but I had a boyfriend. You know how early kids are. So one day in Bliżyn, they said that this is really, really Israel. So we registered again but during this time, my friend said that if they gonna send us to Israel, let's go together. So, this was on a Saturday or Friday. So we decided to get married. So we got married. This was one Sunday morning. And when that order came that who is married and who is gonna register goes to Israel, they took us and they sent us away to another camp. I can't remember the name. And he got sick over there. He got the typhus and all I was married is maybe two days and he got the typhus fever and in a few days he died. So, I wasn't even married a week. That's all.

My brother was left in Radom, in the camp. So, I wanted my brother to be with me together because then I didn't have nobody. And I couldn't go and I couldn't go with nobody to Radom to bring him. And I couldn't ask no German. So one night, a girlfriend of mine and myself, we decided we gonna smuggle ourselves out from the ghetto. We gonna go through a back way and where there's no Germans and we gonna get out somehow. We got out all right. We walked from Bliżyn to Radom, maybe 22 miles. We walked the whole night hiding in the bushes and you know, in the forests. Finally, we arrived in Radom and we cannot go in through the entrance, because the Germans was standing and watching who goes in and who goes out. So, we went to a back street and we found a window to a basement. So you took a stone, and broke the window, and we went down through the window to the basement. It happened to be a very high window - we didn't know. So, we had a hard time. We fell down. And next morning we went out like nothing was ever happen.

So, some people recognized us that we were out to Bliżyn already. And there was Jewish police that time too. There was Germans and there was Jewish police, which they trained them

to watch and to take care of people and beat them up too. So they caught me and they caught her and they sent us back to Bliżyn. Then my brother, he decided that he is not gonna stay – he wants to be together with me. So, he went out through a basement window and he walked and he came to Bliżyn. But in Bliżyn, there were so many people from all other towns that nobody knew if there is a new boy or an old boy. When they counted us, there could always be one more.

When we were in Bliżyn, they counted us every morning. We stayed, and they counted us. If one was missing they were looking in the barracks or wherever happened, you know. And so one morning they counted all the people and there was one missing. There were Germans going around with big dogs – you know, like German Shepherds - and they were going around and they was knocking in every barrack to see if somebody is there. My brother overslept, because he was a young ... he was nine years old. So he overslept when he got up he wanted to go out to the *appell*. The doors were locked, they all were closed. He couldn't get out. Meanwhile, Germans were going around with dogs to see if somebody's someplace. Finally, he was knocking the door, the German, the German, the dogs were smelling that somebody's there standing at the door, so they opened the door and they took him out and they brought him to the *appell*. And they put him down on a bench and they gave him, they gave him a hundred lashes on his back. And he was bleeding horrible. And when they brought him in to the barrack, I went down to see him. And so he said to me, "Don't worry. I be alive."

So after this being another maybe month or two, they segregated people and they took us to Auschwitz. And I didn't know if they took my brother to Auschwitz. They took women. I didn't know what happened in the men's barrack. And the trains when they took us is in cattle trains and they put in hundred, hundred fifty people in one of those wagons and people it was hot and people was dying. They were laying on the floor until we got already to Auschwitz, people were dead in those wagons. So they took us to Auschwitz.

In Auschwitz when we came they stripped us from all the clothes, from everything. They shaved us everywhere. They gave me, which I'll never forget, a brown dress with one sleeve. And no hair, no nothing, wooden shoes. It was just horrible. We looked one at each other and we didn't recognize each other. And they took us to big, big barracks, you know, with bunkers. So, when they took us they made segregation. They said to the right and to the left and to the right and to the left. Nobody knew what's right, nobody knew what's left - where we gonna go. Apparently, one of the, to the right went to the barracks and the left went to the crematorium.

So the crematorium, we saw, when we went to the barracks, when we laid down, we saw the fire very, very high, sky high. They burned all the people. They brought us and took us to the barracks. They gave us a piece of bread next morning and a cup of coffee. That's all. And again we stayed to be counted. Four o'clock in the morning we were woke up, rain, snow or sunshine. One was clinging to the other, because we were freezing to death. So, some people died just staying in the line, in line up to be counted. And after they counted us, they took us to

the barrack again, and then when we got that piece of bread and the coffee, and then Germans came and took us out for work - for work which was absolutely not necessary. We took stones from one place to the other, from one place to the other. And that's just the way to get by with the day. When we came home from work, they gave us a little soup with that ladle just plain water with another piece of bread. This was it.

My brother was behind the gate. The gates were, I mean the wires were with electricity. A lot of people hung on the wires and killed themselves. He was right next to me in the back of the electric wires and he used to throw back for me a piece of bread but to get to that piece of bread was very hard because there were Germans walking back and forth. So, that was very hard to get that piece of bread. So, he met a guy over there on his barrack, where he was. He was a Pollock, a Gentile. He was an electrician. And the Pollock they treated a little bit different especially if he was a professional, he was electrician. They used to go to all of the barracks, fix the lights, fix this, fix that. So they had more freedom. Of course, also with Germans taken care of, you know. So he told that guy, that guy really liked him, because he was a tiny little boy, you know. He told him like he told the Germans that he has a sister – it's a [unclear] right there – he showed him where and she is so nice and she is so good and she is so – he paint a picture like nobody knows. So, this Pollock was really anxious, "How does your sister look?" So, one day, he comes to the barrack and in front of the barrack was two rooms. The ladies which took care of this barrack, they had, you know, rooms like, you know, from wood. So, they showed him to the barrack in, and they pointed out who I am. So, he told me to go down from the bunker, he wants to talk to me. So, I went down and I said, "What do you want?" I talked Polish at the time to him. "What do you want?"

He said, "Your brother told me that you are here and that you such a good girl and that you so beautiful."

I said, "Yes, look at me, how beautiful I am. Am I beautiful?" And he said not to worry about nothing. He's gonna bring me as much food as I can eat. So, I thanked him and I said it's wonderful, and I appreciate. You know, of course, everything in Polish. And he left. A day or two later he came with a whole bag of all kind of things. Bread and rolls and butter and jam and he used to bring me quite often something to eat and I shared with the other girls on the bunker, you know.

Then I get sick on typhus fever. So they took me to the hospital – it was a hospital, it wasn't a hospital – it was just a barrack, you know, with beds. And my brother found out because of he was screaming to the other girls, "Where's my sister?" They told him where the sister is. So, he made that guy come to that hospital and bring me a little bread, a little something. I didn't recognize him. I didn't know who he is, because if you have a typhus you just don't know where you are or what you're doing. But he used to bring me a lot of things. He was very good to me. So, when I got better they are not gonna keep you there. They send you back to the barrack. So, this Pollock talked to a German, and he made the German take me to

work. They were permitted, girls were permitted to go to the Germans' apartments to clean. So he got me out that I could go every morning, the German picked me up and I went to his apartment and I cleaned and I polished his shoes and he gave me to take home a piece of bread and he was really nice to me.

And this was going on, I was in Auschwitz for 18...18...18 months, yeah. Maybe a little bit longer or a little less. I don't remember exactly. They shipped out every day, people was shipped to the crematorium. The French people came and other people, whoever – the Hungarian. They were all segregated and shipped to the crematorium - one to the right and one to the left. Then one time we were standing in an *appell* being counted and one of the girls, she was from Lodz, from Litzmannstadt, a Jewish girl or Polish girl. She was gorgeous. The German was counting us and she saw his gun in the back and he was standing like right next to her and she stayed in back of him. I don't know what happened. She got crazy or something. She grabbed out his gun, and before she could shoot him, they grabbed her. And she was hanging for three days so everybody can march around a whole day for nothing and see her hanging.

They were start talking that the Russians start coming in to Poland. So, there was just talk and we didn't know if it's true, if it's not true. We just heard, you know, rumors. So, shortly after those rumors started, they start sending away people to different camps. They took out this barrack. They segregate us again, and I don't know with other part what happened. Maybe they burned them. And they sent us to Czechoslovakia to an ammunition factory, where they made lamps for underwater ships and for airplanes. We have to work with a loop on the, on your eye. If one little thing didn't check out on the machine, you were killed. That was it.

So we were there, also only girls. This was only girls. We were working, and we were there, and the same, the same food – a little coffee and a piece of bread, and a little coffee and a little soup and a piece of bread at night. And we were there, oh, a long time. I don't even remember how long. A long time. But it was better than in Auschwitz because we didn't have to stay in *appell*, we didn't have to stay at 4:00 in the morning – winter, or summer or anytime. We just stayed in our barracks and they took us in the morning to where we worked. And this was going on, as I say, for a number of months.

After a long time, a long, long time, we heard that the Ger... that the Russians are coming. I don't know how this rumor came to us, but we heard it. So, after as I say, a long time, one morning we get up and we were ready to go to work [unclear] one pushes the other to go get out to work. Nobody's coming to pick us up. So we look at each other and we talk, "What's happened? What's happened?" So, one of the girls said, "You know what? We don't even see the *aufseher*s" – the German women. There were German women with us then. So, we said, "What? Something must have happened." So one asked the other to go out and take a look. And one says, "I don't wanna go, you go." And she said, "I don't wanna go, why don't you go?" And one asks the other to go. Finally, this goes on for hours and hours and nobody comes to see you.

Nobody takes us to work or nothing. One of the girls, she was from Lithuania, she says, "I'm going. We're going to stay like this a whole day. I'm going." She was a beautiful little girl, blonde. She goes out and she comes in screaming, "The Russians are here. We free! The Russians are here." So, we all run out at the street and we see all the Russians around. The Russians are running around like wild, you know. They don't know what they doing and what they want.

So, they take us out from this building. It was a big building. And they take us about ten miles there must have been a concentration camp before, because there was barracks and it was empty. So they take us over there and they say to us girls, there must have been 300 of us, "You stay here, we bring groceries and everything. Some of you know how to cook. You gonna have enough to feed."

After this, we stayed there probably about two, three weeks. We had enough food to eat. We have water. We have food. We have everything. The girls decide, everyone is from a different town. They decided that they wanna go home and they gonna see if somebody is alive after the war. So my two girlfriends and myself, we decided we go to Poland. We see if we have family. There was the three of us. We decided we go. There was no transportation. We went to the train and if you can get on top of a train, you know, they took you. When we arrived in Poland, I arrived in Radom. Radom was the place where I lived. We went to look for a Jewish Community Center or for some Jewish establishment. We found the Jewish Community Center over there already with people which came after the war. And they set up a Jewish Community Center for people which come, you know, needing information. So they didn't find nobody in Radom. I found out that I have an uncle, my mother's youngest brother, which is still alive in Florida. That he is in a little town, Białobrzegi where I was born. This was 30 miles from Radom, and that I have some cousins over there. And I went with a Russian truck. And I went to that little town. In the little town, I found my uncle, I found my husband, which was a second cousin to me. We got married later. And then we decided that we... We found out that my husband has, my husband had two brothers, this – well he will tell the story. He has two brothers, but he didn't know where they are. They were in Buchenwald – also a concentration camp. And he said that he would like to go to find his brothers. So I said, "Well, if you gonna go around like this, let's go to Katowice. It was a town, a big town. We went there and we got married over there at the justice of peace. And from there on, the two weeks, we wanted to go to Buchenwald.

We went to Buchenwald and people told us that his brothers went to Poland to look for him. And I found out that I have a brother, which is the dead little brother, is alive and he is looking for me also and he went to Poland. So we turned around. And we went on train, we went back to Poland. So when we came back to Poland, his brothers were gone and my brother was gone. So here you are - nothing. We knew that his brothers went to Germany – to Landsburg. But about my brother, I didn't know nothing. So we decided to go back - going to Landsburg.

So we went to Landsburg. It was very hard to smuggle through the - what do you call it - to the border. It was very hard. You had to go at night, and you have to find a time when they change, you know, the shifts change. Finally, we came to Germany. From Germany somehow we got into Landsburg. And we found his brothers in Landsburg – two brothers. And the two brothers had already two girls, which they met and they planned to get married in the future. So we lived all in one room - his two brothers, and the two girls, and myself, and my husband. We decide, the brothers decided that they wanna get married. Then we said we just have a marriage through the City Hall. We gonna get married too. So the three brothers had, we had one wedding under a canopy with a rabbi. This was already in the American zone. And all... a lot of Americans Jewish and non-Jewish came to look at the wedding from three brothers, and the one canopy - one was the first one, there was the oldest, and then another one, and we were the third one.

And we lived. We had an apartment. His brothers were working. And my husband was working too. And so we stayed over there in this apartment four years. During these four years, I got pregnant. I had my baby. He was over ten pounds. And we still waited. He was two years and five months when we came to America. So we were in Germany, Landsburg four years. And then his brothers with the wives came. One of the sister-in-laws had a sister in Cleveland so she went to Cleveland. And then the story started. We came to America to Kansas City, Missouri where his father's brother, his uncle, brought us over. He signed affidavits that he is responsible for us. We get jobs and we won't be a burden to the government. So we came, the 22nd of March. This was before Passover.

Source: Bertha Gutovitz video testimony - <https://mchekc.org/portfolio-posts/gutovitzbertha/>