

Ida Loeffler Testimony Transcript

I'm Ida Loeffler. I came from Krakow. I came from a very loving home. My mother was just a housewife and father was a designer – clothing for men. And we were four sisters and a brother. I didn't realize what was happening – how life could be so cruel. So I did belong to Jewish organizations – Judenistic [sic] organization – Akiba [Akiva]. And we tried to build and prepare ourselves for *aliyah* to Israel. We learned Hebrew and we were very young, good organization. Sabbath day was a special day for us. My mother was preparing – baking challah and fish and aroma from this, from this baking was all over the house. It was very pleasant memory.

Interviewer: While you were growing up in Krakow, what schools did you go to when you were younger?

When I was going to like regular school with Polish people were very antisemitic. They didn't like Jews at all. But that was normal way of our lives. Later on I went like *gymnasium* - that is like high school. It was private. Since we, I had a few other sisters and we, my father believed in education. So we couldn't afford to send me to private school. So I went to Polish *gymnasium*. They tried to flunk me, but they couldn't flunk me so I was accepted to Polish school. And, of course, "She's Jewish." I heard that all over. And even I could write beautiful Polish without any, any misspelling, I wasn't graded the best. Before the teacher, the professor told me, "You can't have A, because you are Jewish." Just simple like that. And that was normal life, way of life and religion – Catholic religion – was included to regular daily schedule of learning. So, Jewish girls were excused from school, from the religious classes. But the priest asked us, "Please do come. It is so cold over there in the hall. You don't have to do nothing. Just sit with us." And he was telling the kids, the children, "the Jewish people when they die, they won't go to heaven because they have better life right here and they will only us Christians will go to heaven, because we suffer a lot." And that was my last time what I went to these Catholic classes.

And every Sunday, my mother always kept us home when the people were coming out of church. They were violent and they were trying to beat up on little children – Jewish children. And, therefore, my mother always kept us home during the, after they went out of the church. And churches were teaching people how to hate. And, therefore, I realized when I started to belong to this Jewish organization, Akiba, this Judenistic [sic] organization, we were beautiful youth – young, strong, going forwards.

From my lovely home, and I was spoiled child going to school, didn't know anything what was going on, didn't have to worry about my food or clothing or friends. Suddenly, the life was completely different. Right away when war broke out, they took all the Jewish people to ghetto. And I lived there for [unclear] 1943. Part of my family then gotted permission to go to

ghetto. So they rented house in little village, named Košice, and they lived there – my father, mother and two sister – Felicia and Miriam. Miriam was married. She was with her husband, Schiek. And I stay in ghetto with my brother Paul, sister Sabina, sister Ruth and her husband. And we were lived there for a while. He did has business of his own. But the German took over his business. And he was allowed to work only as a working person there. For a while we were living whatever we had accumulate – the money and we bought a huge amount of grocery when war started. So we live on it.

And my brother-in-law was asked to join police in the ghetto – Jewish police in the ghetto. And they promise him, “If you are going join us, you’ll be able to save your family.” So he tried to join them. But when he seen what he had to do, to catch people, and transporting them to camps, he just, after two days, resigned from his work. And he was transported right away to gas camp. My sister, Ruth, followed him and they went both together. I stayed with my sister, Sabina and brother, Paul. My sister didn’t have no permit to stay in ghetto so she was kinda hiding out all the time. When the German police came in and they were checking if we have permission, we always were hiding both together, so when they came in, we weren’t home. And they couldn’t find us so they couldn’t do nothing. And once, that was probably 1940, between 1941 or two, there was a massive evacuation from ghetto to concentration camp Auschwitz, to gas camp. But I didn’t know at the time what was going on. We were very young. I was at the time 16 years old and my sister was 14. We didn’t realize how to act and what to do. She didn’t have no permit to go to so we went out of the place where we lived and we seen people carrying bundles with them. So my sister said, “I go out, go home and get something.” And the German police caught her. And they took her to Platz Gody over there they stay overnight and right away they went to Auschwitz con... to gas camp. I didn’t have any idea what was going on but somebody else was hiding there in the same building. And it was getting dark and I was waiting for my sister to come back home. And it was getting cold and I was still waiting for her. And this gentleman, he saw that I’m waiting for my sister, he came out, he says, “They took her away. I saw it.” And then I never seen her.

Later on then I left, was left only with mine brother, Paul. And, of course, the place where I lived, there wasn’t no more place of our own. There were people coming and going. Different people were getting out of the, to, from concentration camp, be arrested for certain reason. Then we gotted new people. So, I didn’t know what in our own place who is who even. I just came over there to sleep and I didn’t know nobody. That was place to sleep just only. Without, we had a ration, yes. And no heating at all. And very poor condition, starve to death. Very little rations to eat in ghetto. Very little to eat and somehow we survive. I survive with my brother.

[Interviewer: I would like to know if you would describe some of the activities, the way you spent days in the ghetto?](#)

My house first place, we have to move out from our place, where ever we lived to ghetto. To ghetto. There was two rooms. And we were able to take part of our furniture with us. It was kind of nice from beginning but when the people were coming in and going from our place, some of them, they were killed. Some of them were transporting right directly to gas chamber. Different people were coming in and out of my house. And my morning, probably I wash my face, splash my face with water. We had a water, running water in the kitchen, I remember. And the German... Sometimes we had to walk to, to, to our working place or sometimes they were picking us up with trucks. And I was working in *feld[unclear]stelle* – that is in German, preparation for the war. And they have over there gas masks and plastic what was very unknown to us – big blankets of plastics. And they thought is going be some kind of chemical war. Therefore, in this magazine, they had gas masks and those plastic things. And of course, I didn't handle weapons. They had the weapons was out of our reach. But what I did with those gas max, masks – the filters I removed of the mask in case they were needed to, to do it. And nobody knew about it. And I just dispose of them very quietly. I never told my best friend what I was doing. Nobody knew about it. And then those plastic things – I never seen plastic in my whole life. But then that was 1944 probably between '44, '43 there was plastic already there. And what I maded – I maded holes in them - in those plastics.

But what I did sometimes when I was in ghetto, sometimes I took the plastic. I need to survive. I needed more food than average. Than let's say I needed enough food like normal person, but I never had it so what I did with those plastic. I put around my body and took out of this working place. Went where I used to live and sold this. And this lady, she gave me some money for it – not money, food. So I took to, to ghetto. I didn't look like Jewish person. I was always blonde and taller than the average Jewish person and they didn't recognize me that I am Jewish. Therefore, I smuggle things out of the ghetto and in of the ghetto. I went someplace out of the ghetto and bought provision like eggs on black market – in the store I bought it – and went to ghetto and sold on black market because that's the only way I, we could survive. I was there maybe 17 years old. And we, how I went out – our place where we lived, the basement window was going out of the ghetto. And, of course, it took very small person to get through the window. So I went, I was looking on the patrol because they were patrolling the streets. I was looking. I saw the policeman went one way then I knew it will take him a few minutes to go back. So I sneak out on the ghetto, out of the ghetto and I bought the provision and smuggle into the basement first and I run in back, close up the window and that way, I and my little sister had survive physically. We had more to eat. Otherwise we would die because we were very young people and we needed to, to... We were growing. She was 14 from beginning and I was 16. So you can imagine to be in that kind of position. And, of course, I don't remember how I washed my clothes or probably in cold water on the sink. That's all what I could do. And therefore, when I went to camp, I wanted to work in laundry to keep myself clean.

I was eyewitness in ghetto what they did. We had a hiding place over there. I live on second store and that was off the building – some kind of hiding place, probably used by children

were playing over there and hiding. And there was our hiding place. And there wasn't... People were starting to run around and I said, "Oh let's go over there where something is going on here – something bad is going on." So, I and my sister, we went to the hiding place since I saw it what was going on. I thought, "I'm going fall out from this place and go with the people." I was eyewitness to seeing people throwing children from second store building right to the truck. The adults, they were beating up and they had to walk on their own strength, on their own feet and later on they were transport to gas camp. But what I... It was crushing, crucial to see, the little children. Parents, they dressed them up nice. They thought maybe they are going to have pity – such a beautiful baby. And what I saw, they pick up the baby and throw away just right to the truck. And the blood was running all over the backyard what where I was hiding, what I saw it. And then later on, quiet down everything. They did what they have to do, the German, and they left. So then we went out of the hiding place and people start to clean up the blood - wash off with hoses. And there was this thing in the ghetto.

Later on, they liquidate the ghetto in 1943. And my brother went with the men to Plaszow ghetto and I went to with the women on the women section. I saw my brother a couple times and then I didn't see him anymore and they told me that he went to Auschwitz. And, of course, since I didn't hear nothing of him anymore, so probably he did die. And I left all by myself and tried to strug...

When I came to concentration camp, they asked me where I want to work. And I was thinking, I need to keep myself clean. How I going to survive? So I told her I wanted to work in laundry. And they asked me, "Who was your mother?" I told them, I was lying, of course. I told them she was taking, washing laundry for other people, and my father was a tailors, because I was really wanting this job to keep myself clean and maybe warmer over there. And I stayed there and there was so many different things while I was working in this. There were big board of laundry – washing by hand. And then later on they were boiling them. There was disinfection for lice. And there was - I don't know how many hours we were working – probably 10, 12 hours a day. It was... And food were very scarce. But somehow we survive from day to day.

We had to wake up early in the morning – I don't know what time – it was just started between day and night – maybe 4:00. 5:00 in the morning. And then they called us, *appellplatz* in German. And we were standing there sometimes middle of the winter freezing to death – not one with had any warm clothes. And they were keeping us just to freeze us to death. People were dying. Just, just dropping dead. Just one after the other. And how I survive, I don't know. I remember I don't know how I could do that thinking of that, because I was so young. When I was standing on this place, and freezing to death, I tried to think I am someplace else. I transport my mind on different place – completely different place that I am not here, I am, I am having wonderful time and just like in dreaming – fantasy. And that's what keeps me on going on this *appellplatz*, because people were dying. And sometimes German, if they were in bad nature, they just came in and counted 1-2-3 [unclear] ten, and the tenth person, they shot – they shot to death.

In 1945, in January 15, I never forget this, I was going... We heard, we heard - I didn't know it - but the German, they started to be very nervous around us. And we suspected something is going on. And middle of the night they make a noise to get up and go pack up whatever we want to. They give us provisions and whatever we could carry and make us to walk to concentration camp for Auschwitz. It was a hundred kilometer, but we weren't very strong, so it was very long walk. And, of course, you could grab all the provision you want to, but you couldn't carry with you. So we were dropping a lot, because there was provision for a long time, for long term. So they'd ask us if they wanted to kill us, they want us to walk on our own feet. So we couldn't carry all the provision. Whatever we could we were dropping off loaves of bread on the street. And when we came to concentration camp Auschwitz, we stayed there for a night - overnight and they gave us something to drink. I even don't know what it was - it was nothing. And they say, "You don't have to be afraid anymore. They won't kill you anymore, because the gas camps are already disassembled - taken apart." Those gas camps, those gas chambers they were taken apart already and they don't want it to show, because the Russian people very close to Auschwitz and they didn't want see them, how they exterminate the people. They were still there partially and they were... But the people told us, "they are dysfunction, we don't have no more gas over there or nothing. We can't kill you. So you'll be alive, if you survive."

So then we went to walk on our foot to Germany day and night. And we were thirsty and hungry. We had, I had little tiny provision with me still, but I was so wore out I couldn't even eat. But I was so thirsty. I wanted to drink and they wouldn't allow those, of course - no drinks or nothing. Whoever couldn't make it, he died. You could see bodies on behind you all over - people who didn't survive - who couldn't stand. They were just dropping dead on the ground.

So somehow I survive. Went to Bergen-Belsen - to the camp and just by entering the camp, I smell death. You could smell dead people piled up in front of the barracks. Just like the wood piles - there were piled up dead people. And, of course, I got right away sick. Very sick - typhoid fever. No medication. Nothing. I had very good friends what they walk with me. We were helping each other. That's the only way we could survive. So they were somehow washing me, whatever they could bring me some water, which very seldom. And I was very, very sick. I was dreaming about things - nightmares. And, of course, my body dropped down to nothing without food for three months almost just once in a while something. But those girls they were trying to do the best. Somehow they weren't sick. I don't know why they didn't, they didn't gotted the typhoid fever. But, of course, they weren't stronger, they were just the same - hungry and dirty. But we help each other. So, so I went in this - they took me to kind of *krankenstube* - this little hospital where the people were sleeping place was the *pritsche* - that is like shelves with little straw. And I was placed over there with another person. I don't know who she is - Hungarian. They were trying to bring some food up there. They were feeding us. I couldn't eat and this girl, she ate everything what I... I couldn't eat because I was just too wore out - too weak to eat. So this girl, she was eating everything and suddenly next day they brought

me some food and I wanted to give it to her. I said, "You take this because I can't swallow." I couldn't even lift up the thing. So she didn't answer. I was laying with a dead person for I don't know how long. Then I was really started to be really weak and dreaming of something. I fell out of the sleeping place, which was on second, second shelf. I fell down on the ground and, of course, those girls what they were stronger, were they supposed to watch over us, they picked me up and put me to the pile of with the dead people. Before night was over, they always was taking out those dead people outdoors. But somehow I start to move with my arms and legs. And those girls they say, "Look, she is alive." So they picked me up and few girls - of course, I didn't weigh more than 60 pounds, but they didn't have much strength either - so few girls they lifting me up and they put me back up on the sleeping place. And then they told me the story, because I didn't have any idea what was happening. But one thing I remember while I was laying down, I was very peaceful. Nothing was hurting me and I wasn't hungry. I was relaxed, in peace. But then they brought me back to life. And then I think some months later, we don't have no recollection of days or months or a year - nothing. We didn't know. We didn't know. Only we knew one thing - when was winter or summer, because of the weather. That's all what we knew.

So later on, of course, I was sick and those girls, friends of mine, they tried to come over and see me and comfort me whatever they could. They couldn't do very much but they tried to do the best. And the English people came in and free us. They didn't know how to handle that kind of people. What we were completely like skeletons. You see sometimes skeleton - that's way we look. Only you could see eyes and big nose and bones. And our body, we just couldn't walk. I couldn't walk anymore on my feet. We were just walking skeletons - if we could walk - or laying down skeletons. That's all what we were. And those two girls, they were better off than I was so they tried to come and bring me some water. That's all they could bring me - water to drink and tried to comfort me and tried to comb my hair and as soon as they touch my hair they found the hair in their hands. I lost all my hair. And the Englishmen came in. They didn't know how to handle this kind of people so... And they didn't have very much provision either. They had the military provision for themselves. So they tried to share with us. So they tried to feed the people with bread and meat from cans and people were not able to digest this. And more people died from their food than average per day, average out in concentration camp.

But how I survive - I couldn't eat. Whatever they brought me, those people, I couldn't eat. Everything was completely, my body was completely shrunk. I couldn't swallow even anything. But later on they saw, they tried to make from the German living quarters, they maded hospitals. And those hospitals - they brung those people from concentration camp to hospitals and we gotted to sleep on beautiful, clean beds - white linen. And we were very sick - we had diarrhea - every one of us. And the German, of course, under English supervision. They had to carry the things to bathroom and keep the room cleans. And, of course, in every room was an English soldier to watch the Germans, because they didn't trust them. And it was nice and warm and they cleaned us up. With what? - DT [DDT] powder. DD, DDT powder is very dangerous we found out now. But this is the only way they could kill all the insects on us. They

put on us for two days DDT powder on whole body and hair whatever. And then later on they took us on the washboards and wash us and cleaned us up.

And then I just like that happened something like I would woke up from a bad dream and start to realize, “Where is my family?” And sometimes when I was in camp I was very happy I don’t have them around me because I couldn’t believe that something like that could happen. I, I believed that they are in better place than I am. So therefore, I was kind of happy that they are not with me. But later on, naturally, I found out that they were gassed. In Germany, after I gotted freed, I was working first as a nurse, because I had little bit more education than average. Then, I knew Latin. I went to work in drugstore. And I got acquainted with my husband. He was looking for – he knew that a girl is from Krakow in Bergen-Belsen so he was looking for me and we fell in love. We gotted married. No, we didn’t gotted married. I didn’t want to get married in Germany. I said, “No, I am not going marry in Germany.” So, he found his brother survived and he was in Ger... in Sweden. In Sweden. First he went to Sweden. He found him. He found himself up. He went to Sweden with his brother but because I wasn’t married, I couldn’t go with him. But, because I was working in pharmacy and I knew very many people over there in the office, they told me in the office like that, “Look, we have free passport going to Sweden. If you want it, you could have it.” So, that way I came to Sweden and lived there for ten years.

So we came here to United States. My aunt... Morris’s, my husband’s aunt, send us a tickets. And we went to Sweden to... from Sweden to United States. I would’ve -we would have stayed in Sweden except, people were very sweet and nice and very kind and life was just wonderful. And people were very kind and very helpful and they came to our house and taught us the language and right away how to read and write. They were – I never seen people outgoing people like that, but the climate was so harsh. I was so sick all the time – very, very sick. And since we lost all our families, I wanted somebody closer. So, he went to those, they sent for us, and we came here to Kansas City and established our life. I am very happy to be here in United States – to live in free country. And many things could be improved. The way I see my life... Not my life. I see the country – it could be, we have room for improvement. But I think so longer, is the greatest country in the world.

Source: Ida Loeffler video testimony - <https://mchekc.org/portfolio-posts/loefflerida/>