

*And there was real terror. When we got to the camp and they took over, the inmates looked to see whether we got hidden on the body some other diamonds. They threatened if they're gonna find we have something hidden we're gonna be hanged. He was a Jewish kapo. He just walked around, this kapo, was just beating up people. This wasn't so important if you got hit. It was just the terror. You found out that you're in Auschwitz.*

In Birkenau, my father became prisoner 50864. To the Nazis, he was no longer Gedalia Geclewicz, because names were for humans and Jews were subhuman.

After they were disinfected and shaved, from head to toe, they were given striped shirts and pants. The clothes were handed to them without regard to how they fit. The prisoners were left to exchange clothing with each other when what they were given did not fit.

*When we got to Birkenau they took away all our clothes. They stripped everybody. We were shaven, everything. All the body hair, everywhere. Then they disinfect us. You were issued uniform or other clothes. The prisoner's garb, we got a striped uniform. They gave you a shirt, a pair of pants. No underwear. It didn't even matter what fit or didn't fit. So you had to exchange it with another.*

They asked an old prisoner how one got out of Auschwitz. He pointed and said through the chimney. They could see the crematorium. It was a red brick building with black smoke belching out of the chimney.

The kapos gave a threatening speech to the new inmates. This was accompanied by beatings if the prisoners didn't stand correctly, for anything, for nothing.

*There were appels, roll call, where everyone had to line up. You had to stay for an hour. And if anything didn't add up, they counted us you know, til everything didn't add up we would stay and they used to make certain exercises, punishment exercises. If someone didn't stay proper in the line everybody had to do exercises. You had bend down, knee bends and stretch your arms out and sit there like for 10 minutes. If you fell they beat you. There was such a terror there. And until they had everything, everything was tallied, all the prisoners, the amount of prisoners and nobody escaped.*

The prisoners were told which block would be theirs. All the prisoners slept on the bare concrete floor. The building was an empty rectangular building. The toilet, rows of concrete with holes, that everyone used, was in another barrack.

*You could hardly stretch out. If you slept you had to sleep on somebody else's body. In other words, if you slept your body was laying on somebody's chest or his leg was laying on your body.*

Each daybreak, the prisoners were chased out of the barracks through a single door.

*They chased us out fast. And some were standing by the door and you had to move fast. If we didn't go fast some they used to hit like cattle. Have you seen how they move cattle here through*

*a one door opening, a bunch of cattle they have prods? There they had sticks. They used to hit the people to move faster. There was always constant beating going on.*

*In the morning they gave us coffee, if you could call it coffee. Brown water. For the day we got one piece of bread and a soup. That was all. A soup and a piece of bread and in the morning it was coffee no sugar and this was it.*

I asked Dad if he had to work in Auschwitz.

*They took us once in a while, took us just meaningless work. They took us just to walk a couple of miles, and they put a bunch of grass, you know sod, to move and to carry it from one place to another. Meaningless duties. A couple of times they took us in the morning, they maked [us do] the squats; they walked us some distance and then we walked back. Meaningless.*

Meyer had not been hiding with them. He had been transported out a day or two earlier than the rest of the family. On the third or fourth day after they had arrived at Auschwitz, the brothers found Meyer.

To get out of Auschwitz, my father, Meyer, Leon and Shmiel broke the family pact that they had made in the ghetto—never volunteer for anything. Their reason for doing whatever they could to leave was simple: Nothing could be worse than Auschwitz where the sky was black from human ash. This inferno made them desperate to get out at all costs. Büssing NAG was looking for metal workers to work in their factory, so they sent over a German civilian representative to select workers. (Büssing was constructing camps in the Braunschweig area to fulfill the need for skilled metal workers to handle the increased demand in production of vehicles for military use. Foreign civilian workers into the German economy had slowed to a trickle. So faced with the prospect of a severe labor shortage, two Büssing representatives traveled to Auschwitz to select 1,000–1,200 prisoners fit for work.) The only qualification was how the prisoner looked. If he looked good enough, was young, and the representative felt the company could, as Dad put it, “Get some work out of you,” he was selected. Although they had no metal work experience the brothers volunteered. The first batch of some 350 prisoners, who had passed selection, departed for Braunschweig in the middle of September 1944. This group consisted almost exclusively of Polish Jews from the Lodz ghetto. About 100 men from this transport were provisionally assigned to the Mascherode camp. Again they were stripped of all their clothes, told to shower, and were given striped uniforms: underpants, a striped jacket, pants and a pair shoes. They were given a piece of dark bread and put in the boxcar of a train. The bread each prisoner was given before the journey had to last the three days.