

**Transcript:**

Gertrude Schlanger

A13

20m36s

Interviewer: OK, I know we spoke in the phone a little bit early on.

Gertrude Schlanger: Yeah.

Interviewer: And you understand what the project is about and what we're here to talk about?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yeah concentration camp.

Interviewer: Right, we're going to talk a little about your life in Czechoslovakia pre-war, before the war. Talk a little bit about what you knew, what was going on, a little bit about your family. We're going to talk about the camp. You were in Auschwitz?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yeah.

Interviewer: And you can't recall the other one, the other camp you were at? It's listed that you were at two camps, in Auschwitz and then you can't remember the other one?

Interviewer: Where did you go after Auschwitz? [Unintelligible 0:00:46.1] from Auschwitz?

Gertrude Schlanger: I don't know where I went.

Interviewer: OK, that's OK. We'll talk a little bit about that and then we're going to talk a little bit about liberation, and where you were and what that day was like.

Gertrude Schlanger: Well the lib...they say they'd go liberate us and, and make us free but they never did. They weren't in a hurry to liberate us. We were sleeping in a barn where they had such high grass. I mean, hay.

Interviewer: Let me take you back a little bit. You where raised in Czechoslovakia?

Gertrude Schlanger: Right.

Interviewer: You're one of nine children?

Gertrude Schlanger: Eight.

Interviewer: Eight children, tell me about life pre-war? Tell me a little bit about your family?

Gertrude Schlanger: Well we had very nice family. We were four girls and four boys. My father was a very good father and my mother was a wonderful lady. She was trying to do everything that she could for the children.

Interviewer: What did your father do for a living?

Gertrude Schlanger: We had two horses and a van and that's what he used to deliver food to the next town to [unintelligible 0:02:22.0].

Interviewer: What was life like in Czechoslovakia?

Gertrude Schlanger: We had a very good life. It was very good. My parents were wonderful parents. I couldn't ask for better parents than we had.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about the antisemitism? When did you start to notice that you were being treated differently? Do you remember?

Gertrude Schlanger: Well, when we was in Auschwitz that's when we're started being treated differently otherwise we were, the neighbors, we had very good neighbors and they would help us out. If we needed something and we couldn't get it they would go and get it and they would say, "Here. Here it is. That's what you need. You can have it." We had very good neighbors.

Interviewer: When...You said you were in a ghetto 1945-1946?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you remember which ghetto and where that was?

Gertrude Schlanger: Well, I was in Auschwitz.

Interviewer: OK.

Gertrude Schlanger: And from Auschwitz they took us to work, we were working and by the end of it everybody...they started going to Theresienstadt and on the way everybody stand up, and we left and we were the first one in Czechoslovakia for the Jewish people in home.

Interviewer: Tell me about the day you were sent to Auschwitz.

Gertrude Schlanger: I couldn't tell you the day I don't remember.

Interviewer: No, no, tell me about, about the time that you can remember, what was going on with your family? Your family was being split up?

Gertrude Schlanger: Well, they put the boys in a different place and the girls in a different place and the parents in a different place, what they were doing we didn't know it. What they doing were doing, they put them straight to the gas chamber and burned them. They killed them and then they burned them.

Interviewer: At the time, you didn't know what's going on?

Gertrude Schlanger: We didn't know what's going on. We didn't know nothing about it.

Interviewer: And who were you in Auschwitz with?

Gertrude Schlanger: I was with my two sisters.

Interviewer: Your two sisters. That day that they were dividing the family up, is that the last day you had seen your parents?

Gertrude Schlanger: Right.

Interviewer: And your brothers?

Gertrude Schlanger: Right. My brothers never did come back.

Female: You saw your dad, remember your dad came to this concentration camp?

Gertrude Schlanger: Who?

Female: Your daddy came to the camp?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yeah, my daddy did come to the concentration camp. He was at the real tall fence, but the fence was electric, nobody could touch the fence because if somebody will touch the fence right away, was dead. And he says, "Girls, whatever they give you eat so you will make it. If you're not going to eat you're not going to make it. Whatever they give you eat everything."

Interviewer: Your father told you this?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yes.

Interviewer: This was before you left?

Gertrude Schlanger: That's when we already in Auschwitz.

Interviewer: You had already gotten there. Tell me, do you recall the day that Nazis came into town?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yeah.

Interviewer: Tell me about that day?

Gertrude Schlanger: They didn't do nothing. They just picked the Jews and they said, "You got to go that way," and that's where we had to go and we had to stay there.

Interviewer: Do you remember how you were feeling that day? How your parents were feeling? How your family was feeling?

Gertrude Schlanger: We were---

Interviewer: You were about to be divided, you didn't know where you were going?

Gertrude Schlanger: Right.

Interviewer: Tell me, tell me a little bit about that?

Gertrude Schlanger: Well, we weren't feeling so good because, when you got brothers and sisters and you're together, it's entirely different. But when they separate every one of them, different ways, different street, different things, it's not the same.

Interviewer: You didn't know it was goodbye?

Gertrude Schlanger: We didn't know it nothing and nobody said nothing and we didn't know nothing.

Interviewer: So you, you were together with your family in the ghetto?

Gertrude Schlanger: Two sisters we were really through it.

Interviewer: In Auschwitz?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yeah.

Interviewer: With your two sisters, you were a field worker?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yes.

Interviewer: Tell me about that?

Gertrude Schlanger: Well, they said they're going to give us something better to eat if we go work. What we were doing is putting the potatoes in the ground.

Interviewer: Putting the potatoes in the ground?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yeah, that was for a German family. I don't know how they got us.

Interviewer: Could you eat them?

Gertrude Schlanger: What the raw potatoes?

Interviewer: Yes.

Gertrude Schlanger: You'd be surprised. I've seen some of them, they were eating the raw potatoes and I said, how can you eat a raw potato? She says, "I'm hungry. I got to put something in my stomach so I eat the raw potato."

Interviewer: Did you eat it?

Gertrude Schlanger: No.

Interviewer: No. Tell me about what your strongest memories are of Auschwitz? What do you remember most when you think about it?

Gertrude Schlanger: How they were, how they separated us from everybody, from my parents, from my brothers and that's, that's what, that was I think.

Interviewer: Do you remember the separation?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yeah. Well my parents were very, very good parents and they always took good care of the children.

Interviewer: And they died in camps?

Gertrude Schlanger: Right.

Interviewer: What did they do when you got to Auschwitz? What's the first thing you remember when you got there? What did they do?

Gertrude Schlanger: Nothing. They just separate us and they didn't do nothing. We didn't do nothing.



Interviewer: When you got to the camp--

Gertrude Schlanger: Yeah.

Interviewer: --you got orders to work in the fields?

Gertrude Schlanger: No they...when we got in the camp they said that if somebody wants to work they'd be able to, to drink water because after they put some kind of chemicals in the water, and if somebody drinks water he went through, through it. But if you went to work for somebody you can drink water all you want, and they didn't bother you.

Interviewer: Do you remember---

Gertrude Schlanger: What?

Interviewer: Do you remember anything about Auschwitz outside of the separation?

Gertrude Schlanger: No.

Interviewer: Do you remember the hunger?

Gertrude Schlanger: No.

Interviewer: The cold?

Gertrude Schlanger: Well, everybody was hunger, hungry. They didn't give us the food. They didn't give us too much to eat. So, everybody was hungry.

Interviewer: Some people call their time in camps, their survival, to luck, to faith, to physical strength, what do you think kept you surviving every day?

Gertrude Schlanger: I have no idea.

Interviewer: Do you remember?

Gertrude Schlanger: No.

Interviewer: Why you got up every day?

Gertrude Schlanger: Well, I was with my two sisters and we were always together.

Interviewer: So, maybe you kept each other alive?

Gertrude Schlanger: Right.

Interviewer: Were the three of you together at liberation?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yes.

Interviewer: Tell me about that day? What did you know? Did you know you were in Auschwitz at liberation or where you at another camp at that time?

Gertrude Schlanger: No we were at another camp and we didn't know nothing about it.

Interviewer: You don't remember the camp? Do you remember if it was the Americans or the Russians that liberated the camp?

Gertrude Schlanger: Well, they said that from this side Americans come in and from this side Russians come in, and we were hoping somebody will come and free us, but the Russian did come.

Interviewer: The Russians came?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yes.

Interviewer: OK, tell me about that day. Well, you heard rumors that the Russians and the Americans were coming?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yeah.

Interviewer: And what did you know? What did you think?

Gertrude Schlanger: We didn't think nothing. We were just was hoping everything will come out alright.

Female: They escaped. It's what they did. They snuck out where they were staying.

Interviewer: You escaped?

Female: Yes.

Gertrude Schlanger: By the end of it yeah, well you see, they were talking to Theresienstadt and it was I think a barn, a great size like this one and the straw was that high. So, we hide under it.

Interviewer: Tell me, let me take you back just a couple of minutes, how did you escape?

Gertrude Schlanger: That's what I'm trying to tell you.

Interviewer: No, I mean you were in the hay.

Gertrude Schlanger: Yes.

Interviewer: How did you get there from the barracks? That's what I'm asking.

Gertrude Schlanger: Well we were going to Theresienstadt.

Interviewer: OK.

Gertrude Schlanger: And at night they would put us in a barn to spend the night, so the next day we can start walking again. And when we were out there in that, I think the hay was that high, so we decided we going to stay under it and what happened, the lady came to the door and she says, everybody out! And we were under the straw and when she locked the door, we went through a window and we start going home, and we did. We were the first one in Europe.

Interviewer: How far did you get before someone was able to see you and help you?

Gertrude Schlanger: They didn't help us. We were starting, we started walking and when we got tired we decided we go on a train, because walking from Germany to Czechoslovakia you could not walk. It would take a very, very long time to do it. So, we catch the train and they never did ask for money, even if they would ask for money we didn't have any, because we were slaves in the concentration camp. We didn't have no money, we didn't have nothing. And some of the people they would give us something, some money. Some people they would give us something to eat, so we could hold it up, and we were going home, and we were the first one in Czechoslovakia from a Jewish family.

Interviewer: So you escaped?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yes. Yeah that's when we came out from under the straw. There weren't just three of us, they were 22 ladies.

Interviewer: 22 women?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yes.

Gertrude Schlanger: We came out through the window and we started going home by walking, and then we catch a train and the train took us home.

Interviewer: All of you or just you and your sisters?

Gertrude Schlanger: Me and my sisters and a lady.

Interviewer: And you split up with the other women?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yes. Well every one of them was going in a different direction.

Interviewer: Right. Everybody was going home?

Gertrude Schlanger: Right.

Interviewer: So, you were going back to Czechoslovakia at this time that you were getting on the train?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yeah.

Interviewer: Had the Russians already come in and began liberation, or were you still considered "in hiding"? Were you still hiding to get home?

Gertrude Schlanger: No, we weren't hiding. We were afraid to hide.

Interviewer: OK.

Gertrude Schlanger: We weren't hiding we, they just said if we needed anything they'd be glad to help us out.

Interviewer: Tell me about the train ride home?

Gertrude Schlanger: Well--

Interviewer: What do you remember about that?

Gertrude Schlanger: On the train we went, some of them gave us the seats so we can sit down and some of them were, we were standing up and they say, go ahead sit down you don't have to stand. So, we sit down and they said that if you need, they would give us something to eat while we were out there and they were very nice.

Interviewer: Did these passengers now you were concentration camp survivors?

Gertrude Schlanger: Well, anybody knew because they cut the hair and they didn't grow in but that much. You can tell the hair was short so that it's, that's what it was.

Interviewer: So, they were giving you food?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yes.

Interviewer: How were they treating you?

Gertrude Schlanger: Very nice.

Interviewer: Were they surprised at the conditions that you were living in?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: Did you find that surprising that they were surprised?

Gertrude Schlanger: Well, we were surprised when we got home that some of the things we still find. Some of the neighbors took it and when we came back they gave it back. Some furniture and stuff like that, they did give it back.

Interviewer: So, they held some of your things for you?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yeah, no they didn't hold, they used it.

Interviewer: They used them?

Gertrude Schlanger; Yeah, but when they've seen that we're back, they gave it back.

Interviewer: Now you came back to Czechoslovakia.

Gertrude Schlanger: Yeah.

Interviewer: Is that when you found out that your family was not there anymore?

Gertrude Schlanger: Right.

Interviewer: Tell me about that?

Gertrude Schlanger: What can I tell you?

Interviewer: Tell me about, tell me about what you and your sisters talked about what you went through at that time?

Gertrude Schlanger: We didn't talk about it. We couldn't do nothing. We couldn't bring them nothing. We didn't know nothing what was going on, what we went through.

Interviewer: So what happened after that, after you got home with your sisters? Tell me about that. Did you get medical aid?



Gertrude Schlanger: No.

Interviewer: Were you able to get any assistance at all?

Gertrude Schlanger: No.

Interviewer: The Red Cross or anybody? No?

Gertrude Schlanger: No.

Interviewer: Did you go to work, go to school?

Gertrude Schlanger: No we didn't go to school and we didn't go to work because, we didn't have no kind of job out there, no nothing.

Interviewer: How were you living? Were you living in your old house?

Gertrude Schlanger: I wasn't, yeah, we went back to the house where we left and some of the furniture the neighbors had and they gave it back. They said they board it but they did give us back the furniture and I got engaged to my husband, so I left earlier than my two sisters and they asked me, what they should do with the furniture? And I said, do whatever you want to. I said, I don't want nothing, I don't want nothing from that thing. Well--

Interviewer: So, from Czechoslovakia you got married.

Gertrude Schlanger: In Italy.

Interviewer: In Italy?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yeah.

Interviewer: And you moved where?

Gertrude Schlanger: And moved to United States.

Interviewer: And did you come straight to Tennessee?

Gertrude Schlanger: No, I went straight to Bristol, Connecticut.

Interviewer: To Connecticut.

Gertrude Schlanger: I had there an uncle, I stayed there about a week, and I had a baby, an eight-month baby and she just want me to take, give her the baby for her daughter, and I said, I ain't go give her my baby. I'm going to move. So, I came to Nashville because some of my husband's relatives were out there. So I went out there.

Interviewer: How did you like Nashville?

Gertrude Schlanger: Alright, very good.

Interviewer: Were you able to connect and talk to other survivors that lived here?

Gertrude Schlanger: Some of them yeah.

Interviewer: How did you feel about doing that? How are those conversations for you?

Gertrude Schlanger: We weren't talking about the survivors. We were talking about something different.

Interviewer: Do you talk a lot about what happened?

Gertrude Schlanger: No. It's not such a good talk to say they kill this and they kill this. That's not a very good talk.

Interviewer: Do you think it's important for people to know what happened?

Gertrude Schlanger: People know, some people know and some people don't. I know one guy he was an older man, he says, it's just a story that they kill so many people. I say, you didn't lost nobody so you can say it's a story, but I say it's not a story. My parents went, my sister oldest one she was married, she had a baby. She's gone, and I said my brothers were too young, they were gone and I said, I didn't have anybody left. My oldest brother was, one was 12, one was 10 and 8 and not even one of them did come back. They went straight to the gas chamber and they're gone.

Interviewer: People that tell you it was just a story and it never happened?

Gertrude Schlanger: That's what he said. I told them I said you didn't lost nobody so you can say it's a story. But I say, I'm not saying it's a story, it's a true thing.

Interviewer: What do you want people to know about what happened?

Gertrude Schlanger: Well, even if I would tell them they wouldn't believe it. They would think I made it up. How they were killing, you know good and well how they were killing the people out there. They first give them the, they first give them the gas to kill them and then when they got dead, they burn them and that's it. They couldn't bury so many people. They didn't have no room where to bury them. So when they kill them, they burn them and the ashes won't take too much room.

Interviewer: You want people to remember what happened?

Gertrude Schlanger: Why not? It's something you cannot, you can't hide. Even if I wanted to tell them what happened, they wouldn't believe, some people would say it's just a story talking about it.

Interviewer: You know that's what this project is about, don't you?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you realize that?

Gertrude Schlanger: Yes.

Interviewer: You were, having you here and being a part of this is, is how we're stopping it.

Gertrude Schlanger: I didn't make it up. Believe me. It's true.

Interviewer: I know.