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Excerpt

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It was on July 15, 1942 at about 11:30 P.M. that suddenly two armed SS men, accompanied by a French policeman of the Vichy police, came to my apartment. Living on the second floor, I unfortunately had no chance to escape. A colleague of mine who was living in the same building was caught, too. Within 5 minutes we had to pack a few belongings to take along with us. This organized raid took place at the same hour throughout occupied France, in order to prevent any escape.

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A whole detachment of SS men, with criminal-looking faces, their rifles leveled at us, accompanied by big dogs, received us at the point of destination. They suddenly jumped in wild fury into the wagons and blindly struck out with the butts of their rifles into the crowd. That is how they got us out of the cars and those who could not move quickly enough were beaten to death with a heavy blow on the head or shot. Mothers were trying desperately to hold on to their children. They were separated in the most brutal way or killed instantly. Some children were torn from their mothers' arms, thrown into the air and shot. The fainting mothers were kicked to death by the SS men with their boots, until they were covered with blood and lying dead. Imagine the picture. I felt that I must be having a horrible dream, as though I were going crazy, or as if I were alive in hell. We were then separated, men and women, and assembled in a big room for delousing. There we had to undress completely and were deprived of all our belongings. One of the high-ranking SS officers told us: "Whoever dares to keep money, gold, jewelry or anything of value will be killed instantly!"

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Each one of us had a number tattooed onto his arm, marked for life. My number was 57268, my identification that I have been at ~~Auschwitz~~ Auschwitz. Auschwitz and Birkenau are names closely connected with the whole tragedy of the annihilation of the Jewish people. In this camp about 6 million Jews (70-80% of European Jewry) were killed.

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Not only did I see the destruction of all these Jews; I lived through it. With my own eyes I saw daily how thousands (5,000 - 10,000) - one day even up to 25,000 - of Jews were led to the gas chambers. There

were four huge buildings consisting of gas chambers and crematoria. That is where the daily carloads of Jews stopped. They all had to undress in order to "take a bath." They even were given a piece of soap for that purpose. Once all of them were inside, the door was hermetically closed; this diabolic building was without windows, and those poor victims were caught as in a mousetrap. Each transport was followed by a luxurious car marked with a big Red Cross, the height of German irony, to make airplanes believe they were protecting those people. In this car the SS officers carried the poison which was to be introduced into the chambers through a little opening. It is an awful death -- the poor victims struggled for 10 to 15 minutes -- as men of the SS Sonderkommando reported to me. Those men of the Sonderkommando were also Jews employed in the crematoria. Their work was to put the corpses in the furnaces. These men were kept completely separated from all other inmates and were not allowed to talk to anybody, as they were the actual eyewitnesses of the massacres. During the time I was in Birkenau those Sonderkommandos were changed four times. After 4 - 5 months all men forming the Sonderkommando were shot and a new Sonderkommando was formed.

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Worst of all were the beatings by the Blockaeltesten und Capos (supervisors), also captives, but who had unlimited power over the other prisoners. These men, mostly criminals and murderers condemned to lifetime imprisonment in Germany, had been transferred to our camps in order to take command over us. Each of those chiefs had under his supervision approximately 700 - 800 men. Daily about 50 - 60 of us were beaten to death.

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By a happy chance I was put to work in the hospital and most probably it is thanks to that fact that I am still alive today.

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