



Surviving Auschwitz II-Birkenau

(total running time: 33 minutes)

Auschwitz II-Birkenau, the largest of three concentration camps located near Oświęcim, Poland, functioned between early 1942 and January 1945. Auschwitz II-Birkenau served as one of the Nazis' primary extermination centers, killing an estimated 1.1 to 1.6 million men, women, and children during its three years of operation, most of whom were Jewish. The camp held prisoners from diverse backgrounds, including Jews, Sinti and Roma ("Gypsies"), Poles, Soviet prisoners of war, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, criminals, and political prisoners. Prisoners were forced to work in various capacities, including sorting valuables that the SS camp personnel confiscated from incoming prisoners or working in the gas chambers and crematoria. As Soviet forces approached the camp in January 1945, the SS camp personnel sent many of the surviving prisoners on forced marches, which are often referred to as "death marches." Approximately 5,800 prisoners remained alive in the camp at the time of its liberation on January 27, 1945.

In *Surviving Auschwitz II-Birkenau*, seven former prisoners of the death camp talk about their daily struggles to survive.

First, Peter Hersch (b. 1930 in Loza, Podkarpatska Rus, Czechoslovakia [as of 1991, Ukraine]) describes his deportation to Auschwitz II-Birkenau from the Mukačevo ghetto in a cattle train. He recounts the crowding, confusion, thirst, and unsanitary conditions.

Second, Lili Springer (b. 1930 in Vyskovo nad Tisou, Czechoslovakia [as of 1991, Ukraine]) recounts her first impressions of Auschwitz II-Birkenau after arriving on train. She was put in a line with other relatively healthy people, then given a shower and old clothes to wear. She describes entering the camp while an orchestra played and arriving at her barrack for the first time.

Then, Andrew Burian (b. 1930 in Buštino, Czechoslovakia [as of 1991, Ukraine]) describes the *Appell* (roll-call) in Auschwitz II-Birkenau, when camp guards periodically selected prisoners for forced labor groups or for extermination. He also describes the daily allotment of food in the camp.

Magda Bloom (b. 1930 in Nagyrozsvány, Hungary) describes sorting prisoners' belongings in a section of Auschwitz II-Birkenau known as "Kanada," where the camp guards collected the confiscated property of incoming prisoners. She hid pages from a Torah and prayer book and explains how her faith endured despite her hardships in the camp.

Kitty Fischer (b. 1927 in Olomouc, Czechoslovakia [as of 1993, Czech Republic]) recounts meeting a homosexual prisoner in the camp. He provided her with food and helped her to pass through a selection so that she could be transferred to another camp.

Dario Gabbai (b. 1922 in Salonika, Greece) was a member of a *Sonderkommando*, a "special unit" of prisoners who were forced to work in the gas chambers and crematoria of Auschwitz II-Birkenau. He describes the mass executions that took place in the camp.

Finally, Stephanie Heller (b. 1924 in Subotica, Serbia, Yugoslavia [as of 2006, Serbia]) recounts the forced march that she and other prisoners were sent on as the Allied forces neared the Auschwitz concentration camp complex. She explains the various survival techniques that she and others employed in order to stay alive during this march.