



## From the Testimony of Don Krausz about Life in Westerbork Under the Shadow of Transports

I don't think you've heard of Westerbork. Do you know anything about it? Westerbork was really unusual. Westerbork was not a camp that had been established by the Germans. Westerbork was an internment camp that had been established before the war by the Dutch because from 1933 until 1940, a lot of German Jews came in, many without papers, some without money. And the Dutch government created this internment camp which was under guard from the military police, the Dutch military police, but otherwise was completely run and controlled by these German Jews. When the Germans came in they took this place over. They probably enlarged it, but they left the administration as it was, which was rather clever because it created a situation where the Dutch Jews could only complain about the German Jews. They ran everything. They were not bad to us, but they were very resentful of the Dutch Jews because they felt that the Dutch Jews should have made sure that they were not put into a camp in 1937, '38, '39. That's how it was. So the Germans were in the "Kommandantur", they were the guards around there, because after awhile they took over from the Dutch police, the military police. And then you had the Dutch Waffen SS on the perimeter. The police in the camp was Jewish. Everything was Jewish. The conditions were not bad. They were not concentration camp conditions. There was hunger, but nobody died of starvation. There as hardly ever an execution. I think there were about two executions in all the time that I knew. And you wore your civilian clothing. I went to school there. We had a first class hospital, we had a first class orchestra, we had probably the finest cabaret in the whole of Holland - cabaret, at the theatre - run by Jewish artists who had come from Germany and who had come from Holland. If people wanted to leave the camp for a short while, they could do so. My father and one of my uncles were sent to a Dutch hospital, a private hospital, without guards, without handcuffs or chains. He was given a pass, he was told to report to this hospital and to report back when he was finished. There was only one condition - that if he wasn't



back by a certain time, his wife and his two children would be on the next train to Auschwitz. My father went back to Rotterdam, made arrangements there about his belongings, his private affairs, whatever. He saw his friends. So there was that degree of freedom. I remember on one occasion - alright, I was twelve years old, my sister was about five, six years younger, and we saw at the door - there was barbed wire around, but it wasn't electrified like you got at the concentration camps. There wasn't a proper wall. And we saw that the gate was open and the two of us walked out and we saw there were flowers outside and, like children, we started picking flowers. And I suddenly became aware that there was a rifle sticking out of a bush, aimed at us, so we stopped and we looked. And after awhile a Dutch SS got up - he could have shot us. He didn't. In a concentration camp, if he would have shot us, he would have been given "Urlaub" for three weeks. Right? But he didn't. Okay. But those were the conditions, you know, and we weren't punished for it, we weren't killed for it. In a concentration camp we would have been, without a question. And the only part, besides the weather conditions - it was on the heath. It was hot and dusty in the summer, really dusty. You couldn't keep clean, the barracks were always full of sand. In the winter you froze. In the barracks you had two-tier beds, you know, one above the other. The women and children were on one half of the barrack and the men were in another. I was a child, I was with my mother. The only part that was very, very unpleasant was that once a week, on a Tuesday morning at eleven o'clock, a train would leave, with a thousand Jews, for Auschwitz. Some went to Auschwitz, some went to Sobibor. How did it work? You were woken up at one o'clock in the morning and the barrack leader would come in and he would read out names from a list and he would be listened to in total silence except that as a name was called out, you would hear a cry, you would hear a sob. Okay, this was one o'clock in the morning. People had until probably nine, ten o'clock before they had to get out. What did they do? The ones with families, children started looking for food, going to the kitchen, something for the journey. People used to keep bottles and fill the bottles with water and take the bottles with. They would start to pack. Some people just sat there and cried. The first time we were called out, my father managed to get exemption you know what



exemption it? In other words, he didn't have to go on this transport. Why? Because my father was a sick man. Now, the things I'm going to tell you will probably hurt your feelings, but if you want to hear my story, I've got to say them. Alright? They are not complimentary to the Germans. The Germans were very clever. Our whole family was stopped from going on transport to Auschwitz because my father was sick, so that my father could first go into hospital and be cured, which took about three weeks, and then come out and then we could all be sent on transport, to be gassed in Auschwitz. It was a way of showing people that they didn't have to be afraid. It was deception. You know what deception is -"Betrug"? So that is what kept us alive the first time that we were put on transport. Now, the names Sobibor, Auschwitz were no secrets, it was written on the train, but what these places were nobody knew. We didn't have the slightest idea of what this was about and I don't think that without actually seeing the evidence, being there, anybody, any sane person, could have believed that civilized people could do something like that. After all, it was completely illogical. Alright, Germany was at war, the men were taken from the farms, they were taken from the factories and they were put into front line. Somebody had to replace them. That they would take slave labour, "gastarbeiter" or whatever, that makes sense. That they would take us and put us in the factories, yes, that makes sense. That they would kill us, no, that didn't make sense. And even when people were told in eastern Europe that this is what was happening, nobody would believe it. Civilized people don't do things like that. Alright, so we escaped the first transport. The second time my father came out of the hospital, the second time that our name was called out to go on transport the following morning, my father knew he couldn't go back to the hospital again. I mean, that was something you tried once, right? But he went to the hospital to contact a relation of ours, a man by the name of Dr. Haas. Why? Because Dr. Haas was a doctor and he probably had influence and the idea of contacting Dr. Haas was to try and get Dr. Haas to help us to get our names off that list. Now I must tell you something else. Although our names were on a list, the Germans were not particular who went. If it wasn't Don Krausz, it would be Abie Cohen, whatever. It didn't matter. They wanted one thousand Jews. Now, it was possible, if you had



influence, to get your name removed from the list, but you knew perfectly well that if your name went off the list, somebody else went on. But my father wasn't there to be a saint. My father was there to look after himself and his wife and children, and so he contacted Dr. Haas and they spent the whole night going from one Jewish office and one Jewish employee - what shall I say? Official to another, to see what could be done. And by about nine o'clock the following morning, two hours before the train leaves, my father and Dr. Haas succeeded in getting our names removed from the list. Has my sister told you this?

Q: Not so detailed.

A: Once our name was removed, my father went back to the barrack to tell my mother and us we could now relax for the time being. There was a train leaving every week. Dr. Haas, who apparently must have been on nightshift, by that time didn't have to go back to the hospital. He could back to his barrack. When Dr. Haas got back to his barrack, he found that in the meantime, his name and that of his wife and that of his baby had been put on that list and by that time it was too late to do anything about it, so instead of Dr. Haas saying goodbye to us, we went to say goodbye to Dr. Haas, and I will never forget the look on that man's face. We never saw him or his wife or his baby.

Because we were Hungarian, very shortly thereafter the Hungarians were exempt from those transports. The man who ran Hungary was a man called Horthy. He was the administrator. I've been told he had a Jewish wife. And he persuaded the Germans not to touch the Hungarian Jews - it was none of their business - but we were not sent home. So this went on from September, 1942 until February, 1944. That is, almost a year and a half where we watched our friends come and go, we watched our families come and go because many members of my family had lost their Hungarian citizenship and had become naturalized Dutch and there was nothing that could be done for them. They would come, two, three weeks later they were gone.

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