

From the Testimony of Judith Becker on Arriving at Majdanek

Shoes are the most important thing that you owned, if you owned it, in the camps because if you didn't have shoes your feet got sore and once you had sores on your feet they didn't heal. You couldn't keep up the pace and you might as well have died. You were finished. In Majdanek they took everything. Everything. I mean, the rings were cut off, earrings were pulled out of their lobes. Every orifice was checked. All our documents, everything, everything was taken away from us. As a matter of fact, my mother had her wedding ring and she hadn't taken it off for a long time and it was tight to get out and I figured: "Ah, they're not going to bother about a wedding ring" and the woman right in front of me in Majdanek had a similar situation, so the "*aufseherin*", a woman by the name Alice Orlov - "Orlovska" they called her - she says: "That's no problem." And the Polack who actually did the collecting took a chopper and chopped off the woman's finger. So I said to my mother: "We're not going to go through that" so I let her go first and I went right to this "*aufseherin*" and in my perfect German I said: *Ich wuerde es gerne 'runternehmen aber es ist v'el zueng, koennen sie mir vielleicht helfen!*" So she says: "Yes, gladly." And she took a pair of pliers and she cut off the ring. If not for that, they would have cut off the finger. And by the way, I said to her: "Would you cut off mine, too." I had a little ring that apparently my grandmother had given my father to give to me and I had put it on and never taken it off. And it was tight so she cut that one, too. What I am trying to say is they took everything in Majdanek. And our hair she left. That same terrible "*aufseherin*" in Majdanek, when she looked at my sister and myself - I had long blond braids and my sister had darker brown, sort of brownish hair and also thick braids and they were cutting the hair. So she says: "*Nein, die zwei nicht.*" So really we never had our hair completely shorn, which was very, very important. Now, I started to talk about shoes. When they took away our shoes in Majdanek they gave us instead these Ersatz shoes, these substitutes. And what were they? The uppers were made of some kind of a paper combination

and the lowers were made of some kind of a wood combination. It wasn't real wood, it was makeshift. And that sounded very good, except the wood and the paper separated as soon as it got wet and so you walked, you had to tie it around and you had to do all kinds of things. It was impossible to run fast and you always had to run fast. And in the morning you stood in the mud for as long as they wanted you to stand in these "*appells*" and in the evening. And we were in Majdanek from the fall until the spring so it was muddy and wintery and snowy. So we were in a terrible quandary about shoes. When we got to Plaszow from Majdanek we were *persona non grata* .

Okay, I just wanted to emphasize. I am sure that every survivor's story has something about shoes because they became a matter of life and death. And from Majdanek, when we came to Plaszow, we were transported in these Ersatz shoes and in "*pashaki*", in striped clothing. That was...in Majdanek itself we did not wear striped clothing. They gave us clothing of people who had been shot. We always knew how many people had worn it before by the bullet holes and the problem with those clothes was they were very stiff. They had been dirty and they had a "Jude" painted on the back, you know, a red "J". And they never laundered them - they used to disinfect them. And in the process of disinfecting them they became very stiff and they would give us just one garment, a dress, that's it. No undergarment, no overgarment, in winter, doesn't matter. So when we got the striped suits it was a relief in a way because they were more flexible. They felt a little bit better.

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