

The following is an interview with Mrs. Helen Lang conducted on February 23, 1982 in the afternoon at her home in Southfield, Michigan. The interviewer is Professor Sidney Bolkosky.

Um, could you tell me your name?

Helen Lang.

And where you're from.

I am from Munkacs.

And uh, where, what places were you during the war?

During the war, I was in Budapest and I came home for Eas...for Easter because uh, I wanted to celebrate Easter with my family. And the Germans were there. It was in 1944 and right after Easter, they took us away. They took us in a ghetto.

And, but my father was—would you turn it off? I want to tell you something.

[interruption in interview]

Uh, from, from Budapest in the ghetto, uh...

No...

...where were you then?

I was, I was in Budapest and I came home for the holiday—Easter holi...holiday. And the Germans were there already, but they left us celebrate that Easter holiday. But right after they start to bring in people from the villages—the Jewish people. They made a ghetto. And we lived in the ghetto. That part. But because of my father, he—should he rest in peace, wherever he is—because he was—he had some kind of trophies or something, so they gave us permission to move out from the ghetto and we lived like Gentiles.

Your father was a war hero you said.

Yes, like a war hero, yes. So the whole family, we moved out from the ghetto and one day I remember it was on a Tuesday at noon, I walked down the street—the main street it looked like a ghost town. And a man—a, a boy—a man came to me—he knew that I am Jewish—and he says to me, “What are you doing here on the street? You know you’re not supposed to be here.” And I said to him that, “I have documents that I could walk around like you.” He says, “Why?” I—he—I—so I told him the reason. He says, “Well I just came from the German office and people like you they all going to—and, and pretty soon they going to be all uh, come and get you and take you away.” He says, “You better go home right away and tell your parents and get away from that house. Go out from that house. Go any place because they going to come and get you.” So I rushed home. We were having dinner and I said it to my family there—sitting and setting—that this and this happened to me, that this guy came to me and told me these things. As soon as I said it, the Germans—there were maybe six Germans with bayonets—that’s how you call them bayonets? And they gave us five minutes we should get ready and they took us out with a truck to the station. And there were other people like we a—we were and they took us to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Were you in other camps during the war?

Only there—yes from Birkenau we were there for four weeks and then they took us to Stutt...Stutthof. We were in Stutthof for four weeks, and then they took us to Danzig—by Danzig. They had a new—they made a new concentration camp

that was brand new when we walked in. We were five hundred girls. And then they added three hundred more. So we were there.

And then?

And we stayed there.

Until the end of the war.

Well, then we had to go—we were evacuating that place because the Russians were coming. It was around—in January.

And you went to where?

We were walking, we, we were walking all over. We, we didn't even know where we were because everybody was evacuating the, the people from the towns that, that we were walking—full of Germans. We were going—we didn't know even where we were going.

Into Germany though?

We didn't know where, where we were going, we—and then we, we escaped.

Three of us escaped. I was always with my sister together, and then a friend of mine—three of us escaped.

Okay, we'll, we'll come back and talk about that. So you were then in three different camps. Is that right?

Yes.

Can you tell me something about what life in Munkacs was like...

Before the war?

...before the war.

Before we were Hungarians? Before we were Ger...I mean Hungarians?

Yes, when you were still Czech.

You see, in 1938 we become Czech. We had it very good. It was a democratic uh, uh, state. It was—I know that people, I remember my parents used to say people who came visiting from America they said that this is a beautiful co... a little co...this is like, you could call it like little America. It was so nice.

How large was your family?

My family? Pare...five children. I have a, a sister, and I had three brothers, but now I have only two, because one brother uh, he died in concentration camp.

And the other two brothers?

They're here. One of 'em was in uh, Russia, in a prison. And uh, my sister was married at that time and her husband was in Russia in prison too, but she had a little baby so she lived with us. So...

And your parents.

And my parents, yes.

And they were lost during the war?

Yeah, they were killed in gas chamber.

Um, were there any grandparents, aunts, uncles?

Oh yes, I had, I had a grandfather. He was ninety-two years old and, and, and uh, they took him to concentration camp. He died there too—my grandmother and grandpa.

You—the uh, your extended family—your aunts, uncles...

Oh yes...

...cousins...

...of course.

...how large would you say?

How many?

Yeah.

Well, it, it came, you know, cousins and second cousins and aunts and uncles.

Well, I can't exactly, you know, put the numbers on it, but uh, you know, come from a large family.

Um, and they all...

???

...live nearby?

Yes.

All in Munkacs?

Yeah, we, we lived all in Munkacs, yes.

In the same neighborhood, or...

Oh no, you know, scattered, scattered. But, as I say, Munkacs, you know, it was like a walking distance...

Yeah.

...all over where you went it was ????. It was a beautiful city.

What kind of school did you go to? Was it a, a...

In the Czech school.

Czech school? Was it...

Yes, high school.

Uh, not just a Jewish school, it was a...

No, that's a Czech—we went to Czech—I went, I went to Czech school.

Did anyone in your family go to uh, to cheder or...

Oh yes, of course. I come from a religious family. We were religious. My parents were very religious.

So you belonged to a—you went to shul.

Yeah.

How many...

You see, children, children didn't go that time to shul. It just the parents went to shul. We went to visit them, like, you know. That's how it was, you know.

So what, what would a Friday night be like?

Oh beautiful. We had a Friday night dinner, Shabbos, everything with wine. It was like a real, real Jewish uh, event.

And, and you ???.

Oh yes.

And your father would go to shul and you would...

Oh yes, oh yes. My father would go uh, every afternoon uh, in shul there too. Oh yes.

Uh, what did your father do? Was he a...

Well, he had a, a business. You see, my father was an invalid. So my mother took care of it. We had a business, like a restaurant. So my mother, my mother was there in the business and naturally we helped too.

Uh, in the restaurant, you said your father was a veteran...

Yes.

...in World War I, was that...

Mm-hm.

...did he have a tobacco license too, to sell tobacco?

Yes, yes. How you know that? Yes.

Did they take that away from him later?

Not by the Czech.

No, I mean later, the Hungarians did.

Of course, of course, of course. Plus, my father was on pension too because of that.

I see. What, what kind of a cultural life was there in Munkacs? I mean, did, were there plays...

Yes.

...uh, movies...

There was, there was a movie—one movie house. There was—not in the summertime but every winter there was a theater. You know, sometimes even the Jewish people, you know, from Polish—I remember my mother used to go and see it...

A Yiddish theater.

...you know, the Yiddish theater. Once in awhile, you know, they came down. So uh, well, what else? Uh, we had a, a, you know, which was uh, the Hebrew uh, how should I say? It's not a high school but a gymnasium we called it.

Mm-hm.

That was only in our town, you know. There was a lot of schooling by us, educationally.

Was there a rebbe in Munkacs?

Oh yeah, very famous.

Do you remember his name? Was, did he...

Uh, I can't remember but I could ask my brother and he, you know...

All right. He was a Cha...a Chasid?

He was—very much. Oh, he was very famous, very famous rabbi. The Munkacs rebbe. Oh my gosh. A very famous. I, I—first of all they didn't even, I mean, call him by the name, they just called him by the Munkacs rebbe.

The rebbe.

You know, so I, I don't remember about that.

Was anyone in your family uh, uh, interested in politics at all? Any of your brothers?

Oh, we were—they were all talking about politics. You know, everybody was interested in everything—what's going on in this world—but we just didn't know it, especially when we were Hungarians. You know, they, they didn't tell us the truth. They, they, they wrote in the paper whatever they wanted us to know.

Be...before the Hungarians came, was, was there anybody active in the uh, in the Bund or in the Zionist party?

Oh yes. I had an uncle—he should rest in peace, he would died uh, seven years ago—he was very religious, he was a big Mizrachi person. Oh he belonged—and I as a little girl, you know, we had many, many uh, uh, things going on, like there

was the, the Betar, there was the, the, the Zionist, there was—there were so many. I always went to all of ‘em, like a little girl, you know, my friends, “Come on to this meeting, come on to this meeting, come on.” I went to all of them, you know. So I actually didn’t belong to them, but I liked the idea, you know.

Now um, did, do you remember Benes at all?

Of course. He was our president.

Your family liked him?

Yes, everybody liked him. Masaryk was better yet.

Yeah. So you remember Masaryk too.

I remember well, sure, Masaryk. Oh he was, he was the top man. Of course Benes and uh, sure, he was our president.

What did uh, what was the reaction in your family when uh, uh, the Germans came...

We were scared.

...into the Sudetenland?

We knew that something will happen, but we just didn’t now exactly what’s going to happen. Everybody was scared. But we couldn’t help it. We didn’t know what to do, you know.

What had you heard about Germany, that, that they were, uh...

We heard about Germany that they take away the Jews. But we didn’t know—that’s as far as we heard—they’re taking them away. Where? What? We didn’t know.

Did you speak German at home, was it?

No, Jewish.

So Yiddish and, uh...

Yiddish.

...it was in East, so you were—this was in Eastern Czechoslovakia, right? In the Eastern parts of Czechoslo...the Kárpátok...

Right, Kárpátok yeah.

Um, do you know how many synagogues there were in the city?

In the city? Yeah, I think it was like three or four.

And they were all Orthodox?

All orthodox. By us it was one way or the other. You know, there was no middle way like, you know, here where those temples here that, uh it was no su...in a small town there is no such a thing.

Were there uh, social organizations—Jewish uh, welfare organizations that took care of uh, the Jewish community?

Oh yes, oh yes, there were. But I don't remember. I was a little girl. I don't remember these things.

All right, uh...

I'm sure it was. The Joint—just a minute—it was—they called it the Joint. If a Jewish person wanted some help or something, that's what they called, the Joint.

So it would be Joint Committee probably.

It's—that's how they called it—a Joint. It just occurred to me now that you talk about it, I remember.

What happened to that, to that organization during, during the war? I mean, 1938, was—did it become more active? Did...

The Joint?

Let's say, when, when the ghettos came?

Well, and you see, we, we got only the ghettoes when the Germans came in to '44.

In 1944, I see.

Thirty-eight we become Hungarians. See until '38 we were Czech.

Yeah.

And after that we become Hungarians. Remember when Chamberlain and oh, I don't know...

Yeah.

...whoever, divided, you know? So we become one of the Hungarians too.

Which...

Were the Jews in Munkacs upset about that?

Yes, because the Hungarians, they were a little bit—they weren't like the, the Czech people. Czech people are intelligent people, educated, but those morons, those Hungarians, they, they were brutal, they were—they weren't like uh, you know. Then it came out when the Hungarians came in that six percent they call it. So from six percent—let's say half the Gentiles could have stores—no, ninety-four percent could have the Gentile stores and six percent only Jewish people could have the stores. So they took away from a lot of Jews businesses. They called it six percent.

Did they buy them or just take them?

That I don't know, but they—well, they had liquidate, I think, the Jews. I don't think they bought it. They didn't pay money for it, but the Gentile people went and opened there the store. Didn't need the merchandise, they could have gotten the merchandise, but...

Did you know anybody that that happened to?

It didn't happen to us because, as I say, because of my father.

Your father, yeah.

See? It took us a long time 'til we got back our license.

Tobacco license...

See at first, first they took away everybody's license, so nobody could have a store open. And then slowly and slowly, you know, people, you know, like six percent plus like we are got it back. It took us maybe six months. It was a tough time then.

What did you do then?

It was very tough.

Did your father still have his pension?

It took a long time 'til he got his pension too. So we had it very tough.

Yeah.

Five children to feed, I don't have to tell you. It was very tough. That's why...

Now how old were the children?

...that's why I went to Budapest. I was a young girl, and I went to work. I worked in Budapest.

I see.

You see? And my brother—my other brother who lives in Los Angeles he went there too—he was there too. And plus, my brother was—one of them was in the—already in the, in the front some place in the Russian. We didn't know, you know, where he is. My sister with the baby stayed with us, because she didn't know where her husband is. And I...

When was this—these...

That was already in 19...around '40, '40, '41.

Forty-one—if he was in Russia it would be '41, yeah.

Pardon? Yeah, they were

If he was in Russia it would be '41.

Yeah, that was already in Russia.

Do you have, did you have relatives in Budapest that you went to stay with or...

No...

Oh.

...I just went by myself.

And you had a job there.

I looked for a job. I was reluctant to go, believe me, it was very tough. And I went into a store—no, my sister gave me an address. She had a girlfriend there. And that girlfriend—we went to a store something to buy, and—because I told her I would like to get a job or something. And we went to a store something like this for selling threads or materials, something. And this friend asked the owner, “Do you have, maybe you know somebody who needs a girl for a job? Anything?” So

there was the man, he says, “Well you know how to sew a machine?” I says, “I know how to sew a machine.” I didn’t know.

Hm.

Especially a electric machine—I never had that. And I said, “Yes.” So he says, “Okay, come tomorrow night.” That’s how I start to work there on a machine. I didn’t know how to do it. I was so slow, you know, I was young. But he was—he wasn’t Jewish. So he tried and tried and then he says, “Ah,” he says—he, he, you know. He figured that I am not good enough. So I went someplace else, I found another job and I was stayed there.

Also as a seam...

As a piece worker. Then, here already I, I learned how to sew on the sewing machine—on the electric one. So it was already easier for me to go tell him that, “Yes, I know how to,” you know, I felt better that uh, and that’s how I, I was a piece worker then, making dresses.

Now you said your sister had a friend in Budapest...

Yes.

...before, before 1938...

Mm-hm.

...did um, did people from Munkacs travel to Hungary? Did they know people in

Budapest uh, um, was it easy to go, go back and forth between countries?

Yes, it was because I was already Hungarian, so for me it was easy to go to

Budapest.

But before 1938?

Ah, that I don't know. To Budapest you had to have a visa.

I see.

You had this, you know, it's a different...

So the friend in Budapest was what? Was this friend Czech or was it just a Hungarian?

A Hungarian. It's a friend of my uh, sister—just a friend, I mean not a girlfriend, just a friend. And she gave me just, I mean just I should be able to go some place. I didn't have any relatives there, you know. Just to have an address to go there so that she should...

Yeah.

...you know. But her friend had another friend and I slept at her other friend...

These were Jewish?

...you know, I paid for it—yes...

Also Jewish people?

...I paid for it, you know. My uh, parents gave me fifty pengo, you know, that was a lot of money, you know. So I should, you know, as a start-up. So I slept there. And this woman took me to that place, and she says, "Come on, I'm going to try." I said, "I would like to go to work." So that's why I went to Budapest.

Do you think that, that uh, before 1938 now...

Yeah.

...that most Czechs felt the same way about the Hungarians, that they...

Oh they disliked each other.

Even then.

Oh, my gosh, we were big enemies. You know, one said, “You took my territory,” the other one said, “No, you took my territory.” Oh, they were the biggest enemy.

Um, in Czechoslovakia—in Munkacs, you said it was a predominantly...

Jewish.

...a Jewish city. But uh, from the Gentile population, do you remember any anti-Semitic incidents with—before the war—before ‘38?

I don’t remember, I’ll tell you that, I don’t remember that it was anything, you know. I mean, I’m sure there were. You know, there was always an account that they, they don’t like the Jews, I’m sure. But I never got in contact with that.

Your family either?

No, my family didn’t get in contact with it. As long as they were neighbors, you know. You know, there was neighbors, you know, that they weren’t Jewish and, you know, they behaved themselves, you know, nice.

Okay, so now then, before the war you were going to school...

Mm-hm.

...um, if, if the Hungarians had not come in 1938, what kind of plans would you have had for the future? If there had been—what were you thinking of doing in the next uh, ten years, say?

Never thought of it. Would you believe it? I, I never thought of it.

And your brothers, would they have taken over the business?

Well, they weren’t in the business. No, they were separate. Like my brother, he was a sailor’s man—my oldest brother. And my other brother he worked in a, in a store—oh, how should I say—like a hardware store. He liked that.

Did anybody want to go to Israel?

To Palestine at that time? I know my uncle. He was living for that...

Yeah.

...that one day he...he'll be able to go with his family. Well, we were—I tell you, how it was by us. I don't think my mother would want to go any place, because she had her parents. They lived like in next house, you know? I remember my father used to say when we were small that—you see, he had here a sister and a brother in America. And he says that he always wanted, right after they got married with my mother that they wanted to—he wanted to come to America very badly. And my mother says, “I don't want to go no place. I don't want to leave my parents.” So by us, it was like this. My mother was a very devoted daughter to her parents. There wasn't a day that she didn't go and see. They were older people already. “I want to go see my, my father and my mother.” That was her first stop before she went to business. Always going to see if they're all right. So by us, there was never even thought of it that to, to leave because of that.

Hm. Now when the Hungarians came, did the, did the Hungarian army march into the city?

Yes. And how, and how...

Do you remember that day?

Yes, everybody was so unhappy. Everybody was unhappy because we knew what they are. They're anti-Semitic, very much so.

Now did...

They even made remarks, when they walked in, you know. The soldiers—they saw—they heard about it that there are so many Jews here. And they start to say, “Oh, wait, what we’re going to do to the Jews here.” So we knew already. That’s what my parents heard, somebody told them. “Wait what’s going to happen now to the Jews.” And it happened. And it happened.

What’s the first thing you remember? Was—were there laws passed?

Well, they were right away the six percent, like I told you.

Did that happen...

That happened...

And those went to Hungarian businesses?

With the Hungarians, yes, mm-hm.

What about uh, armbands? Do you remember having to wear armbands?

That when the Germans came in.

The Germans came.

You see, that’s what I’m talking about, that I—when I went out that they on the street I didn’t have my armband—the yellow one. And that’s why the Gentile man came to me, says, “What you doing here with no armband?”

What was the punishment for that, do you remember?

For the non...nobody would dare to go out without the armband. They—we were so scared we were shivering from the Germans. When we saw a German we were just shivering.

But until the Germans came, what kind of changes—between 1938 and 1944—what kind of changes took place in your daily life? Did you still go to school, did you uh, did you go to theaters still? Uh...

There were no more. The Jews didn't go.

Mm.

The Jews already stayed away, you know, from things like that. We didn't go anymore.

And school?

And school. Mm-mm. No, it was already very limited. We knew already that, you know, these Hungarians they are like the same—almost like the Germans.

Do you remember the um, a name, do you remember Admiral Horthy?

Horthy? Miklos?

Mm-hm.

Sure.

What did your family feel about him? Or what did you feel about him? Did you know anything about him?

I didn't know nothing about him. I know he didn't like—I heard that he didn't like the Jews.

And the uh, somebody named Imrédy?

Imrédy?

Imrédy.

What was he? It's a familiar, his name.

Prime minister of Hungary.

Prime minister. Imrédy. It rings a bell but I, I, I don't recall.

Do you remember any of the prime ministers? Sztójay um, or Szálasi?

Szálasi? Oh, Szálasi was the biggest stinking—Budapest going on with the Hakenkreuz.

Yeah.

Ugh.

Did you see him?

No, no, no. But the pictures were all over of him in, in Budapest when I was there.

Ah in Buda...when was that? In...

I was—I went to Budapest I think it was in '40 or '41.

And the pictures were there then.

Oh, of course, the building where there are—on the ??? Street. There, you know, they had their headquarters there and there was the big picture of him. And, and I didn't even want to look at him.

Do you remember the name of the group that he was with?

Uh, well...

The Arrow Cross.

Szálasi uh, they called it...

Was it the Arrow Cross party, do you remember?

It was the Cross—the, the Hakenkreuz.

The Hungarian Nazi Party.

Yes, that's right.

Do you remember when he became prime minister in 1944?

Forty four?

Yeah.

He did? I don't know.

Well, of course, that's the time when you were gone...

That's the time they took—when we were gone, of course. No, I, I didn't, you know. No, I don't remember. I know that they hanged him, or they did something to him.

At the end, yeah.

Too bad...

Too bad.

...they—that they just did that.

Um, when you were in Budapest, you weren't, you weren't in the ghetto then?

No. In Budapest? There was no ghetto at that time.

No, but I mean...

I...

...when the ghetto—when the Germans came there was a ghetto in Budapest. They were starting to form a ghetto? And you...

No, not when I went home. They didn't start it. They just started first, you know, they were coming up like this.

So there was a ghetto in Munkacs.

Was a ghetto in Munkacs.

I see.

We had a ghetto in Munkacs.

Who—and you were there during the ghetto time.

I went home, yes.

Uh, who was in charge of the ghetto then?

You mean—well, there were—you mean the Jews?

Were there any Jews put in charge of it, or were they...

Yes, they were. They were Jews. You know, they led them. They were always talking to the Germans like, you know. Ah, and I think one of, I think one of them was the main speaker there—I forgot his name. He was a little businessman in Munkacs. And because of that—because he arranged all these things—so his whole family—they let them go to ??? I think. They said, “Wipe the whole family.”

And they—what did they do? I mean, what—did they send...

Well...

...people off to uh, work to...

Where? To work where?

Well, were the Germans asking for laborers, for workers?

Nothing. They just picked them up.

Just picked them up from...

You know, they brought them in from the villages. They made a ghetto—they put them in there. You know, they had to take ‘em in—whoever lived there, you know. They had to take ‘em in. And uh, then when all the villages were emptied out—all the Jews—then they start to take them...

Mm-hm. To the train.

...to the train and then they went to Auschwitz.

Do you remember if the Czechs, uh, worked with the Germans or was it just the Hungarians who worked with—did any Czechs cooperate with the Germans?

There was no Czechs in our town. When the, when the Hungarians came over they fled.

They all left.

They all left. They didn't want to stay there. Oh, they all fled. Of course.

I see. Where were you...

Do you mind if I smoke?

No.

You know, when you asked for me talk like this, I get a little bit wind up.

Do you um, remember where you were—what you were doing when the war started—when the Hungarians first came?

Where I was...

Were you at home? Were you in the streets?

I was at home. Oh, I was watching the—everybody was watching from the houses—from the windows—the way they walking in—the Hungarians. The Czech went away, the Czech are leave, the Czech people—I told you, they all went out. None of them remained there. They knew already if they going to stay there they're going to kill—they left everything there—the Czech people—whatever they could, they went away.

Was there any talk about fighting the Hungarians?

They did. They did. The Czech and the, you know, there was a certain uh, uh, oh how do you call it—you know, like the Czech were here and the Hungarian over here. How you—the border...

Mm-hm.

...see, the border. They, they had some fights, but uh, the Czech never succeeded. Never. Even they used tanks and everything. Nothing happened.

Uh, when you—when the Germans came in...

Yeah.

...you were in Munkacs...

Yeah.

...you came back from Budapest...

Budapest, that's right.

...uh, you said something interesting. You said that you came back to celebrate Easter...

That's right.

...was that just a holiday?

A—our holiday, Pesach.

Was it Pesach? Okay.

Yes.

Uh...

That's why we—that why I came home.

For Pesach.

For Pesach.

Now...

If I would have remained in Budapest, I wouldn't have been in concentration camp. I would do something to live like a non-Jews. There you could do it—hide there. But here I came home, and I wanted to be with the family. You know, we were a very close family, you know. And we were, you know, my mother wanted me to be home. You know, it was a big thing—a holiday—Easter holiday so she wanted to that I come home. And naturally I wouldn't want it otherwise. So I came home.

But they gave you five minutes to get ready.

Mm-hm.

Did they tell you take, take anything?

You take in five minutes whatever you want. They said it in German. And they standing like this.

With guns.

With guns. Can you imagine helpless people with a baby—my sister had a little baby—eighteen month old baby.

What happened to the baby?

What happened to the baby—then I'll tell you another story. So five minutes we had to get ready. So naturally, what did we take for the baby—the clothes and for the baby my mother had prepared cookies and sardines, things like that. Just the baby should have it, you know. And that's how we fled. And I took some clothes for myself—a couple dresses or something. Everybody took something and the mainly for the baby, naturally because the first grandchild in our family, you

know. So you can imagine how my parents felt about that baby—it was everything, it was her life. You know, so we went and then they took us out like this. We went out, you know, like, like gangsters. They were uh, and we went to the truck. And then they took us to the, to the train.

To the Umschlagplatz.

And then they told us we should take off all the jewelry. I had a little ring, you know. My brother was a jeweler at that time and when he got engaged—so he give me a little ring too, you know. And he gave me a little watch. So that—we had to throw everything down by the train. All the jewelry we got there. And my father couldn't move so fast and there was a Hungarian start to beat up my father because he didn't move. And we had to just go and see it. We couldn't do anything, because my father didn't move as fast as he should. So then we went into the train.

The trains were there waiting.

The trains were there, yes, the trains were there.

Were they cattle cars?

Cattle cars, yes. And we went in there maybe it was—I, I don't think we, we couldn't lay down with so many. There were maybe sixty people.

Was there any food or water?

They gave us some water and they give us—there was a something that, you know, that we could go there. And then when we start to go I think and so many kilometer we were going, so they had to empty that and they gave us water. No

food whatsoever. Everybody brought a little cookie, a little this, a little that, you know.

So there was one, one what—a pail?

A pail like...

A toilet facility...

That, that's what it was.

...for the whole train—for the whole car.

For the whole train, mm-hm. Everybody was going there in front of everybody...

Mm-hm.

...so we couldn't help ourselves.

How long were you on the train?

Three days and three nights.

Did, did anyone die on the train?

No.

Were they sick?

There were sick people there, of course. I'll never forget that. There was a woman—they brought her in from a village. She was in the ghetto and somehow—how she got on that train, I don't know. She had maybe nine children, like this, and she was pregnant yet. That woman was so exhausted because she was living already I don't know how many weeks in the ghetto with nine children and pregnant. And these kids were always going to her, "Mother, mom give me this. Mom I'm so hungry." And she didn't have what to do. So everybody from us gave a cookie or something. We had to do it, you know. And it came at night

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when we sit down, we were sleeping, all of a sudden I felt here little leg, here a little ???, here a little hand. You know, they were all scared that these kids—on all over—on everybody. You know, that was so heartbreaking. And that poor woman—she was so religious, she was carrying the tallit—her husband’s tallit. She didn’t know where her husband is. So that was such a sad thing to, to live through with all those little children. And that woman was so tired, she was so exhausted. And these kids always came to her to beg for her, “Mom I want thi...” you know, in Jewish. “I’m hungry, I’m thirsty.” And she always says, “Go and ask that lady. She’s going to give you—go and ask her,” you know. It was—that, as long as I live, that I will never forget with these little children—what they went through. And the wind up is—where did they wind up? Anyway, the train trip, what can I tell you how it was. We didn’t know where we going to wind up, what’s going to happen to us. We knew already they going to kill us. That’s what we had in mind. What else...

Had you ever heard of Auschwitz before?

No, never, never, never. But we arrived there in Birkenau.

When uh, when the doors opened up, what do you remember about what you saw?

Oh I have good memories there. When we got out, they told us we should take very little stuff with us.

Who told you?

Just the Germans.

There were Germans.

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Yes. The Germans said that we should stay in line—five in the line. On this side the women, on this side the men. We should take very little with us. So naturally we were taking just for the baby, you know. The clothes and the little bag with cookies, whatever was left of—so I was holding the baby and my sister was carrying and my mother was carrying and were—and two other women—I don't remember who it was in the line—because we had to be five. And slowly, slowly walking. And there was a man—I think he was a Polish. I'm not sure why he was working there with a shovel. And he looked at me and he says to me—in Jewish “Leygn arop dos kind.” And with all those Germans and to come out from a closed up place in this hollering with these Germans and all with the guns, with the bayonets are going around. We didn't know what's happening. And that guy was working there by the track—by the train track. He was cleaning up, I guess, the stuff what everybody left in the train. And I guess he looked at me and he figured, “Why ca...why shouldn't I save a young girl?” So he kept on, and we were going slowly, slowly, you know. And, and I was holding still the baby. And he pretended that he...he's working there and he comes, he says to me “Legyn arop dos kind.”

He wanted you to...

To put the baby down.

Yeah.

And, and I says to my sister—she was standing by me—I says—I didn't know what was going on. H—says, “Take ???.” She says to me, “Look, my hands are so full, I, I just can't take him too.” So I turned to my mother, I says, “Anyu, take the

baby.” She says, “Look it, I can’t. I, I have all this stuff in my hand. I can’t put these down, this is for the baby.” In the meantime we were walking slowly, slowly. And the man—and that man—he, he saw that I don’t listen to him and he came to me, he says—so angrily—he says, “Legyn arop dos kind un gain tsu di rekht.” You understand?

Go to the right.

He says, “Put down the baby and you go to the right.” And I still didn’t pay no attention to him, because, you know, they didn’t—I couldn’t let—he was eighteen months old. I couldn’t let him with all these people, he would run away. So I was holding him. So let’s say that, you know, there was a dividing line. The Germans Me...I think Mengele was standing there, or whatever. I don’t know who he was standing—some Germans. See to the right you went to the camps, and straight you went to the gas chamber. So I—we were already so close. So that man came and he give me such a thing with that shovel. He says, “I want you to put down that baby right now and go to the right.” He told me in Jewish that. So I went and I gr...grabbed a hold of my si...I put down the baby. I grabbed my sister and I—we went to the right. And I looked back and I saw my mother was putting down the stuff and she got a hold of the baby. And she went with the baby. When we got there, in a, in a place there they were shaving us, you know, all over they were shaving us. And they said to us that the older people will take care of the children. We’re going to work. Then they put us to a—I think we were standing there all night in that place.

Had they given you clothes?

They gave us clothes.

So you had to undress first.

We had to undress yes. We got those uh, we got the grey or the striped ones. The grey ones—we got the grey. We got to keep the shoes. But we got the dresses, the grey dresses. Everything we had to leave there already. Then we went to—I think next day. They kept us all night there. We didn't know how, what—at that time we didn't know it's the gas chamber, nothing. We had to wait 'til, 'til one uh, how do you call it—those houses there...

The bunkers.

...the bunkers. ??? So we went into the bunkers...

[interruption in interview]

...it was eight people to—if one turned around, the other one had to turn around.

Eight people...

Eight people, yeah, upper ???.

...on the upper ?????

Yeah. As I say, if one had to turn around, the other had to turn, that's how close we were by. We were sleeping there with people. Next day we had to go for Zählappell, they called it—I think six o'clock—to count us that we didn't escape. That was every morning and every night. Well, we went—first we had to go wash. There was, you know, a toilet. Well, you know, probably that—how it was there. It was just holes there.

Mm-hm.

And then we went in the washing room and uh, we washed ourselves. It was so cold there in the morning, you know, that water was so cold. They didn't let us soap, nothing. We didn't dry ourselves with our clothes. And that's how we came out, we Zählappell.

What was the water like...

It was...

...besides cold. Was it...

...it was very cold water. Very cold.

...was it grey water?

It was standing a little bit. It was rusty, it was red...

Mm-hm.

...that kind of water they had there. And then we had to Zählappell, five in the line, you know. There was the Stubenälteste who there took care of us, you know. She was like the boss or something of us. She had to see that we stay in order. And then the German came and counted us. And then we went back in the room. We didn't—yeah, we got breakfast. We—what did we have—we got the piece of margarine like this, one little spoon of, of jam and then a piece of bread. That was it for all day long. And at night, we did the same thing. And then we got some soup. They gave us some plate and maybe six or eight people. We had no spoons, nothing. We were everybody was drinking like this from there. It was like a bowl and everybody was drink. It was just I think uh, soup—they put some dress or something. You couldn't see even at the table there. And everybody drank from that uh, bowl.

Were you wondering about your mother?

Yes. You see, my sister's husband brother lived in Slovakia and those Slovak people they took us away, I think, in '40. And all of a sudden we heard that my sister's sister-in-law is there. ??? was her name—is her name. I don't know the last name. But when we, we heard that—so my sister says to me, she says, “It would be good that, you know, we should let know that ??? that we are here.” Big deal. So I think she sent a message with one of those Stubenältestes, you know, they called them, you know, those, not Kapo, I mean, they weren't mean, you know.

Yeah.

They were all from Slovakia and my sister says is there a ???—I forgot her last name. And she says, “Oh yeah.” She says, will you please tell her—we couldn't go anyplace—tell her that her sister-in-law is here. So one day ??? arrives—her sister. It was maybe after the third day. We still didn't know what was going on. And, and she says—and, well, she brought some toothpaste for uh, you know, toothbrush. We didn't have that. So she says, “Tell me when I will be able to go and see my baby, you know, he went with my mother.” She says, “You're crazy?” She says, “Your mother and your baby is all uh, out in the smoke already.” She says, “What you think that smell?” You know, that was a horrible smell. We smelled it there. She says, “Why you think that smell is here? That's the bones—the people—they're burning here the people.” When my sister heard that, she just wanted to go to the fence. You know the fence was electric.

Electric.

And she says, “I don’t want to live anymore, I want to die. I want to go to the fence. It’s no use for me to live more. My baby is dead, and, they killed my baby.” And I had a such a tough time with my sister. I said, “Tell me, are you going to help?” I start to talk to her. I says, “You gonna help your baby that you’re going to be dead too? What can you do? Let’s see what’s going to happen.” “No, no, I want to die, I don’t want to live.” And ah, she gave me such a rough time. In the meantime, I was drinking that water there, I was always thirsty somehow. I start to drink that water and I got sick.

Dysentery.

Yes. I was already going out with blood. And I said to my sister, I says, “I don’t know what to do.” Then she had to take of me, you know. So she had something to think about. So, which in a way it was good. So she says, “Look, I don’t want you to report it, because whoever reported it you’re sick, now you know there was the gas chamber.” She says, “You just stay here.” So she gave me because I couldn’t drink that soup. It was—when you dranked it from the bowl, you felt sand like, you know. You know, sand, what they have outside. I felt that between my teeth and I just couldn’t eat that. So she went and she was drinking my portion of soup and she gave me her bread, you know. So, and then it was already after three weeks we were there that I got so sick, you know, but I didn’t want to go, because I knew already what’s going on here. It’s no good here that when you report that you’re sick. So then I uh, she gave me and I was still sick. But after four weeks, they took us away again. All night long we were sitting in that washroom. We thought for sure that they’re going to turn on the, the gas and, you

know, we'll be dead. But, yes, and when they selected us to go away again, so we had to stay naked in front of Mengele to pose for him—all naked—the clothes we had to put on, to show that, you know, that we're young or if we have any scars they put 'em aside, you know. Who had some kind of operations, you know uh, incisions or something or something was wrong or, you know. They put them aside and we were turning pose for him, you know. We were turning around to show us that, you know, nothing—there's nothing wrong with her. They had to go on that side and whoever had something wrong were standing here. I remember there was a friend of mine—her mother was there too and they put her mother aside and the daughter says, “Well I want to go too. Wherever my mother goes...” I guess she didn't know what was going on. She says, “I want to go with my mother.” She was a young girl. They put her aside too. So I know where she went because I never saw her again. So then we went to Stutthof.

Where is, is this in France?

No, that was Poland.

In Poland, okay.

That's Poland.

Because there's a Struthof.

Stutthof.

Yeah, Stutthof. Okay.

Stutthof. We arrived five thousand girls from Auschwitz in Stutthof. In Stuffhof that—we have no hair. You know, they cut off—maybe it start to grow like this because we were a month in Auschwitz. So we arrived in, in Stutthof, five

thousand girls. And there, there were some German—not German—they were some French uh, uh, soldiers they took, the Germans captured. But we were wired, you know. We were all wired in. We were separate and they were separate. And they looked at us and they thought they didn't know what, what's going on here? They said, "What is this, that human?" And one of them threw a bottle and I caught it and it was milk. And I said to my sister, I says, "Can you imagine? Look what I caught." They threw us—they threw some soap, they threw chocolate, you know, the girls were all thin—and I caught that milk and I says, "Shari, come look what we got." So we—both of us, you know, we drank it. It was something that—what can I tell you? So after that—so soon as we they let us go into the, the—to the camp and there was a Polish guy and he looked at me, he says—yeah, we had already numbers on the dresses—so he said to me, "You know what?" He...

Were you tattooed?

No tattooed. No, no tattooed. Just on the dress...

On the dresses, okay.

...we had a number. So he says, "You know what?" He picked me. I remember from five thousand—there were such beautiful girls there, such a nice—he says, "You know what? I want you to help me to write down that uh, the numbers." So in the meantime my sister went and uh, and there and I helped him. That meant already that I'm going to get two bowls of soup. And I did that—he was a Polish Gentile fellow, not Jewish.

A prisoner.

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A prisoner, yes. And I helped him. And, and then next day—and, and I went in, and I looked at my sister in the bunker. Everyday the same thing, Zählappell, we had to stay out, they counted us. From there I don't know who could even run away, we were so blocked in there with all those fences. But they were counting, that was their everyday routine, they had to do it. In the morning I ran out. In the meantime, I got that guy—I helped him so I got already two plates of soup so it made me—I started to get—feel much better because I wasn't drinking that water anymore there by itself. So I got two plates of soup and I gave it naturally with my sister. And all of a sudden my sister got sick, she had some ear infection. So here, I knew already, I said “Sharika you have to do whatever—put something—when you were in—when it comes to Zählappell, you have to come out. They should count you.” I knew already what was going on. So she tried. She tried to stay there—Zählappell—‘til the Germans came and counted all of us. And then somebody—a German—we were walking out on the street—a German came and asked the girls who speaks German. And I ran to him—lots of ‘em ran to him—and he picked me that I should take care of—like a Stubenältester, you know, to take care of somebody. He wants something, you know, so I don't have to stay just in the ????. I could walk around and I got that red ribbon, you know. That means two plates of, of soup too. It was already a relief that I could help my sister too, you know, two of us. And that's what happened. So we were there. In the meantime that, that Polish guy he came too—he brought me a piece of chocolate. He says, “Now put it away. Eat it.” He brought me toothpaste, you know. Which was very nice—he couldn't talk to me, you know. Because the Germans were all

over, but he says, “Here have something, here have something, and take care of yourself. Watch out for yourself. Be careful.” So I had something already, you know, that I figured, “My gosh, you know, he’s not a Jewish guy and he’s so nice to me. Why?” You know, I was wondering. So then I figured, well, he must have some feelings for human beings, you know. So and then we stayed there—how long can I say? So there I had already—I felt that there—as I say, I got two plates of soup, I had the food, you know. And I—here I was just worrying about my sister—she should get better. Here I wouldn’t dare to go and take her to doctor. God forbid. But, you know, she got better a little bit. In the meantime, they were taking us away again.

What, what did you do each day in the...

Nothing. In Stutthof.

Nothing. And what—in Birkenau? Were you wor...

Nothing.

Nothing there either.

Nothing. See were that type of a girls that they were transporting them for work. Some place wherever we were needed. As I say, five thousand girls went from Birkenau to Stutthof. And from Stutthof there they were deciding where—which, you know, how many go wherever. So then they took us. They were standing—we were standing outside. Took us out from all the bunkers and that, because I had a red ribbon, I didn’t have to stay in the line no more. I was helping to put the people they should stay in the line, you know. So then there was that Polish fellow too. He said, “You know, you don’t have to go if you don’t want to.” I

says, "Where are we going?" He says, "I don't know." He—I says uh, and my sister was already lined up, you know, and they were counting five hundred girls to go where, I don't know. He says to me, "Don't go." I says, "Can you take out my sister from the line?" He says, "No she is in the front and the German's there, I cannot do it." I said, "Then I am going. If you can't do nothing for my sister there," I said, "then I'm going." He says, "Don't go." I said, "Take out"—you know that was going on, "take out my sister here." We couldn't talk like this because the Germans were there. You know, just a little bit ??? I went this way, he went that way. He said, "Don't go, don't go." I says, "Take out my sister." He says, "I can't." You know, it was going on like this. So it was the, the close to five hundred the girl, you know. And my sister—poor my sister's looking, looking if I'm coming or coming. Here I was hoping he's going to take her out, but he, he kept on saying, "I can't do it. Look at the Germans, they don't want to move from there. I can't take her out." I was the five hundred. I says, "If you don't take out my sister than I'm going." And I went with them.

To another train?

To another train. We were traveling. I don't even remember how long. We went to Praust. It's by Danzig, you know Danzig in Poland. They had a brand new concentration camp, we were the first one there. But I went with a ribbon already, you know, I didn't take off my ribbon. I went with the ribbon.

Can I stop—what, what did some of the other prisoners say to you? Did they—were they angry because you had the ribbon? Did they, did they...

No.

...appreciate the help you were giving.

I didn't do nothing. You know what I was doing? I was helping them to line up. I didn't do anything.

Okay.

I didn't do anything, nothing. Nothing. I just had the ribbon, you know. That means that I could walk around, I could tell 'em, "You go in the line. Stay in the line." I mean, I wasn't mean to them, you know. Would it matter if somebody else, but somehow I, I got so ambitious. I, I wanted to do something, you know, to help—maybe to help for the people there. I couldn't do anything. I was happy. They give me two plates of soup because I had that ribbon. I didn't do actually anything. So anyway we went away to, to Praust. Brand new concentration camp. It wasn't wired, electric, you know, with electricity.

Were there bar...was there barbed wire.

Barbed wire, of course. And we started out there, but then the Germans came and they stayed with us. So, some of the women they were in the kitchen. And now they started out to get the people out to go to work. They went out to work, they were making a field, I think. So they had to—I think with a shovel, work—I never went out to work with a shovel. I somehow always managed—I was in the kitchen busy, you know. I was helping them. You see they had a pump out...outside. You had to pump outside to get the water in the kitchen. So for five hundred people, you can imagine. So I didn't have no room, nothing to do in the kitchen, because there they selected already who's going to cook. So I figured, I'm going to go and pump. Just not to go out to work, you know, because I saw

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my sister was going out to work. It was already in the summertime, the sun was—they were so red. They had no hose on the legs so some of the girls that, you know, they had those dresses—short dresses, and their own shoes yet. So here the, the, the leg—the feet was open. So that the sun shouldn't burn them, they went and they got some from the field there some kind of leaves, you know. And they covered up the legs with, with those leaves. And they didn't realize it that the—those leaves they had bugs. And they ran into their legs, those bugs. So don't ask how they looked. So in the meantime, these women—some of them—they couldn't go out to work. They had to stay—we had a so-called doctor there. They stayed there for a few days because those, those, bugs went into their meat. So it—they got so bad that they didn't have no solution—no anything to do for them—so they accumulate them—how many were sick, in a truck, they took 'em back. They went to Stutthof and they brought back some other girls. But thank God my sister didn't do that, you know. But she looked terrible here. And me—I—as I say, again two plates of soup so she had already the food, not like the rest of 'em. They had to stay in the line and they put a little soup in their plates, you know. But my sister—I gave my sister because I eat something else in the kitchen, you know. But in the meantime I was pumping that water and I just didn't want to move from that place. It was pretty hot. I don't know if you can imagine, just to keep on pumping and pumping, you know. And there they needed a lot of water in the kitchen, you know, for cooking, for washing the dishes. But I just didn't want to go out to work somehow, to—but I—because I seen how these girls coming back. They were there for, for, I don't know, ten hours on the sun...

And they were digging trenches...

Yes.

...tank trenches?

They were digging the, the ground, I don't know for what. That's what they were doing.

The guard—were the guards SS men?

There was a guard—of course.

Were there any women who were guards in the camp?

After that came two women. You see, when I was pumping the water, all of a sudden two women arriving—Germans—that they're going to take care of us. They needed them, I don't know for what. There were men uh, guards, you know, they go—went out with the girls and they came back with the girls. But two women—all of a sudden we see two women. So the people from, the people from the kitchen that washed the dishes, we were a few there, you know, a few of us. But I still had my red band; I didn't want to take it off. You know, they should see that, you know, they shouldn't send me out to work. So a few girls were standing there and that German woman—one of them—came out and she says, "I need a girl." And she looks around and she says, "You." She picked me. She says, "I want you should come." So she picked me. I says, "Oh my gosh, I don't have to pump the water no more." So she took me in to her uh, place. She, she was maybe a forty-five year old women. She says, "Look, I want you to take care of me." She says, "You're going to be like my mother. You take care of me." I could have been her daughter. She says, "You're going to watch out for me. You're going to

bring in the meals for me and you're going to, uh..." So that's what I did. I cleaned up her place. In the morning I went in maybe at four o'clock to make fire, you know. I'm talking about already when it's, you know, because she needed warm water. I should wash her. I washed her from top to bottom, her legs everything.

Do you remember her name?

Yeah uh, Macha. Uh, she, she was a Polish-German.

That was her first name, Macha?

Macha, that's how they called her...

Yeah.

...Macha. She was—I'm telling you, she was like a fire. If I see she, she asked me first if I speak German and I said "Yes." I figured Yiddish and German is the same thing. But many times I didn't understand what she was saying. And, whoa, she even give me some slaps too. And I had to wash for her and take care of her and—I didn't tell her I had a sister here. But one day she says to me, "You know, we need another Blockältester instead of you." I didn't do anything. She says—you see, you had to be so smart there. You had to be so shrewd there. I don't know what it was with me. I'm not a shrewd person. But somehow there, whatever I did it was—worked for me. Let's put it this way, I was mazldik.

Good luck.

That's right. She says to me, "I need a woman to, to uh, take care of uh, four hundred people." You know, with the barracks there were four hundred people on that side and three hundred on this side. "I need..." I says, "I have a good woman

for you.” What else can I tell her? She says, “Okay, show it to her—show—I want you to show her for me at Zählappell.” I said, “I’ll show you. She’s very good. She would be very sufficient.” So I showed to her my sister. Who else should I show? So it came my sister didn’t go out for work anymore. That I succeeded that she shouldn’t go out. She had to tell the girls when in the morning went to Zahl, Zählappell how to stand five in the line and take care of your blankets, cover up your bed, whatever, you know. There—and she—and if some of ‘em didn’t do it she ran in to do it because many time she went in to look around if everything is in order, so she didn’t want to show that, you know, that, that girls are uh, you know, they don’t care, they leave a mess. So that’s what my sister—that was her job. In the meantime she got already two plates too. So then, the Germans went away—they left. They didn’t, you know—first one of ‘em went away—she did. I had to uh, you know, they were some—I had to bathe them, you know, to wash them, which it wasn’t—I, I’m not the type, you know. I couldn’t be a nurse, but here I had to do it. So I washed them. I, I, I did clean them. I did everything. I, I was like a maid. But many girls were envying me.

To more than just this one woman?

To the both of them.

To both women.

Both women, but one of ‘em, I think, there was no need for her to be there. They sent her away. So I remained only with that one woman.

Macha.

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Macha, yeah. And I took care of her. As I say, I was like her mother, you know. I got up at four o'clock. I went late—you see, they lived—the Germans lived like outside from the camp, you know. So every night I had to even put her to sleep to take care of her, and then I could leave. So it was already night—ten o'clock at night when I left. And I had to go in around four o'clock in the morning to take of her, to water—start the—a fire, you know, in the little oven there and to warm up for her the water and wash her and, you know, things like that. And, uh...

What—do you remember any of the names of any other guards? Any, any, any uh, specific times when they were...

No. We never called them by names.

Yeah. Did the, did the guards...

We didn't....

...talk to the prisoners?

Some of 'em didn't say one word because they couldn't stand it what was going on. They were afraid to, to say something. Turn it off.

[interruption in interview]

And when I was in Auschwitz that the girls—I don't know who these girls was—in a blanket they were, they were carrying boiled potatoes. And I was so hungry that I went and I wanted to grab a few potatoes. And the, the Blockältester saw it—that what I was doing. She came and she gave me a slap. And I turned around and I give her another slap. I am not a leftie, but somehow that's how it came out because I had the potatoes in my right hand and she made me drop them. You

know, that blood was coming from of her mouth. And if she would have reported me, I could—I wouldn't be here today.

She didn't report you.

She did not report me. She was just wiping her mouth.

Were you ever punished...

No.

...for anything?

She was a Jewish girl but from Slovakia. These girls, they went through hell, you know. And she—it was nice enough about her that she did nothing. I was so hungry. Do you know what the most horrible thing is in this world? When you're hungry and you're cold. I think you rather take the hunger than the cold. But both of them are very, very, very ????. What you take, cream and sugar?

Uh...

[interruption in interview]

Did you ever see anyone at Birkenau or Stutthof, um, receive any punishment of any kind? Any executions?

I seen in Birkenau—I mean in Praust when we had that German woman—you see, the girls were going out to work there and not far from there, there were the French uh, uh, guys who, uh...

Prisoners of war?

Prisoners of war. So, you know how the French people are. You know, they were getting from home packages—for care packages. They had more than we did. So they were getting for the girls chocolate, they were getting toothpaste, which we

never got. They were getting toothbrushes, soap, you know, things like this. And they were writing, you know. One day I was out there and the—those guys were working someplace not far from our place and one of ‘em saw me. And he send a letter with a girl, you know. He described me, you know. And that girl gave me that letter. You know it was a, like an inspiration, a little life, you know. Not that everyday wonder what’s going to happen to us. And that, that girl—well, he was—I think he was of Polish descent, but he was a French or he was fighting with the French people and the Germans captured it. He had that, that French uniform, you know, French soldier.

Mm-hm.

But actually he was a Polish. And he was writing in German, for me. So I said to the girl, “I don’t know how to write—who want to write either.” So I gave her a plate of uh, my meal, you know. And he was sending me chocolate. He was a little bit, you know, not much. And I went—I always shared everything with my sister. And one day he was sending me toothpaste and toothbrush, which I needed—soap. We didn’t get enough soap we should wash ourselves. But one day, one of the German came back and told Macha that he caught her with a letter. She was corresponding with a French. So that girl—they had to bring out the girl and my Macha took her—I think it was a belt, and he start to hit her twenty-five on her back.

Macha started to hit.

Macha did it, yes. And she lined up all the girls there. If they going to do it, that’s what’s going to happen to them. That girl—I think that that girl—I don’t think she

lasted too long because her kidney—there was something wrong with the kidneys already. That thick square—she was hitting her twenty five like this, she was going. She didn't have any strength anymore when it came to seventeen and eighteen. And she was hur...doing it. Twenty...had to be twenty-five. When my sister saw it, she says, "Please, stop doing it. Stop writing your, your uh, guy. Don't do it, please don't do it." She was sick about it. Can you imagine me who takes care of her is—she's going to catch with—and he was writing "Dear Helenka," my name was Helenka in Hungarian, you know, that she knew it would be me because my name was Helenka. She says, "I, I couldn't live through that to see that she should do that to you." But I did it.

You continued anyway?

I continued anyway.

Did you ever meet him, talk to him?

I never. I ne...I saw him just so close like you are. Once we went someplace and he was there with the rest of the guys and he came and looked at me. That's all. Never spoke to each other. But I heard after the war he went to Munk...because he asked for my address. And I gave it to him and somebody told me that he was in Munkacs to look for me. I mean, this was just a little inspiration in the Lager—in the concentration camp. There was nothing serious with me, you know. But something, you know, to look...

Did men and women ever get together? Did they...

Never.

They could never meet with each other.

Never. We had never. Mm-mm no. So when Macha went away—is it on?

Mm-hm.

So when Macha went away, they replaced her—oh, I'm doing it wrong. Before Macha came, there was a guy. When I—you see, I am mixed up, I'm sorry.

That's all right, as long as the stories come out.

Before Macha came there was a German guy. I was pumping and he was the one who needed a girl to take care of him, and he choosed me. And he took me into his room. I mean, the doors were open—the rest of the guys lived there. Here a room, here a room, here a room, you know. I mean, it wasn't that he was a, you know, he had—he was alone like all together.

Was he, was he an officer?

An officer. What, I don't know...

All right, but not a prisoner.

...and—not a prisoner, no, a German. He was the most ugliest man. I cannot even compare what an ugly looking man he was. I had to clean up the room for him, sweep up the room, take care of his bed. You know, they had those blankets just cover up the blanket. And that was my things to do. In the meantime he, he, he didn't—he sat. He had a table and two chairs, he was sitting there, he didn't even look at me. He put aside—there was like a bank—a, a, a some chair or something. He put a piece of bread and margarine. He says, “You take this for you, but watch out,” he said. So I somehow obviously snuck it in and gave it for my sister. That was beginning when she was going to work yet. So at least I had more bread to give her too. Plus she had a, you know, plate of soup. So health-wise she was all

right. But that sun, you know. So that man—and I was doing that—but in the meantime all day long I had nothing else to do. So I went in back to pump the water. I was afraid if I have nothing to do they going to send me out to work, and I just didn't want to do that. So I kept on just pushing the water, you know. He was with us, what can I say, two weeks. And then I went—so I went in, or I helped in the kitchen to wash the dishes, just get busy, you know. And when he, he was, he called me—he didn't call me by name—he said to the girl, “Just tell the Kleiner Blockältester I want her.” “The Kleiner Blockältester—why did he want me?” He was preparing a piece of bread he shared with me. He says, “Here I want you to take this here, but be careful.” One day after two weeks, I heard they calling me again. ??? what was calls me. So I go into his room. He says to me, “I am replaced, I have to go away.” He said—and when the Germans, they go away they give ‘em for so many days food, you know, the rations, salami, margarine, everything. He says, “I—that’s all yours,” he says, “and you be careful. You watch out for yourself.” And that was it.

Was he an SS man?

SS man.

He was an SS man.

He was an SS man. He says, “Watch out.” He says, “Take care of yourself.” And that was it.

Did he ever approach you for any other reason?

Never. Never. Never. So when he left, so I had salami. Who had salami there, you know. So I took it there and I, you know, at night and nobody sees it. I didn't

want—because if the girls would see it they all would jump on me. Everybody—I couldn't give eight hundred—the girls—that little piece—I think was two breads, you know, salami, a margarine and, and jam. Whatever they give him, he give me everything. I don't know the guy involved survived. I don't know where he was going. After that the two Germans came.

Two women.

The two women. So then I was called too, you know. As I say, I, I was very lucky. So then I was with her and they stayed with us for a long time. So these girls who came in were sick, and I told you with these bugs and the legs—they had to replace them. And I says to her—Macha—she was going to take them back and bring healthy ones. I says, “You know, I would like you should take me with you. Maybe I could find some relatives there to bring ‘em over here.” She says, “Good, come with me.” Can you imagine—yes. So I had already a coat at that time. It was in the fall, like—and I had a coat where my hair was maybe that long. So she says to me, “Put on a babushka, you know, make it, you know, cover it up like, make—fix it up nicely. We'll go on the train. You gonna be traveling like a Gentile.” So we went with the train and I looked around and I said to—and I thought to myself, “Is it possible, is it true? Me as a Jew on a German train? They're all Germans around here and I am the only Jew, that I should be able to travel on a train now?” Yet, is it possible, you know. All, all these things were always on my thoughts. So where did we go? We went to Stutthof. When we arrived to Stutthof, who was there, that German—that guy, you know. He says to

me, “What are you doing here?” So that the Macha says to him, “Well she’s my ???.” You know what that ??? is? A mate.

Hm.

You know, a German, better, worse. ??? I remember it. She—“Oh, my ???.” He says to her, “You better take good care of her.” She says, “Yes, I will commander,” you know. “Oh yes, I will take care of her.”

You don’t remember his name?

No. No, as I say, he never spoke to me...

Yeah.

You know. We go a little bit further, there is the Polish guy, you know, I helped to put the number.

From Birkenau.

No, Stutthof.

He was in Stutthof.

Stutthof. He says to me, “Wie gehts?” you know, it’s like in German, “How you doing?” I says, “I’m doing all right.” I says, “How are you doing?” He says, “I’m doing all right.” He said, “It’s too bad that you left from here.” I says, “No,” I says, “I am with my sister.” I said, “That’s all I wanted.” He said, “I’m sorry I couldn’t take out your sister.” And that was it. That was our conversation. In the meantime I says to, to uh, Macha, “There is some girls from Munkacs, I know them, they have the red things too. Let me sleep with them.” The next day I’m going to go through all the, the places and see if I could find somebody who I know because I think seventeen girls we took back—we have to bring seventeen

back—healthy ones. So I slept there with these girls, you know, with my frie...friends—they were from Munkacs. Next day, she says to a German woman—Macha tells to a German woman, she says, “I want you to take...” she pointed at me, “to all the camps and she has to select seventeen girls. You better take her around and whoever she, she tells you to pick, you gonna...”

[interruption in interview]

...I couldn't find one familiar face. They weren't there anymore. They were taking 'em away someplace. I couldn't find anybody. So then I told her—I says, “Macha, I couldn't find anybody. I couldn't—they're, they're, they're not there anymore. They took them away.” So she picked seventeen girls and we went back to Praust.

Now how much longer were you in Praust?

In Praust, in January—around January the people they were emptying Stutthof because the Russians were coming close. So overnight somehow they let them sleep in our block—men, women, all together, you know. So who arrived? The Polish guy. He says to me, “Wie gehts? How you doing here?” I said, “I'm doing all right.” I says, “I have the food.” He says, “Look, I am Polish, I know the territory here. I have some men's clothes, come with us.” He says, “I have some friends, we're going to escape.” I says, “I have my sister. Would you take my sister?” He says, “No, I can't.” I said, “I'm sorry, I'm not going.” And he said, “You sure?” I said, “Yes, I am sure. I'm not going to leave my sister.” He said, “Do you have everything?” I says, “You know what? Now I'm going to ask you, do you need anything?” I says, “Think what I could give you—I gave you my

share of bread. Do you want that? I'll be more than happy. You were nice to me when I needed you." I said, "No, I can't—at least that much, ask me for something." He says, "No, I—we don't need anything. We're all prepared to do our things. We gonna escape. Come with us." I don't know how many they were. He says, "But I have men's clothes, come on." I say, "No, I'm not going." He says, "I wish you good luck and I hope you succeed whatever you do with..." he said—I said. And that was it. I never saw him in my life.

They escaped. You don't know. Hm.

I have no idea.

In any other camps you were in, was there any talk of escape or resistance?

No.

People smuggled out.

Maybe these Polish people were doing it, but we didn't know about it. We were women, we were such innocent, stupid people. We—whatever they said we did.

What about uh, religious...

Nothing.

...service? Nothing.

Nothing.

Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur?

Nothing.

Nothing.

Nothing, nothing. You know, that, that Macha, she said once—boy, she was a bastard—she, she says, well—she was a big Hitler—"Our father, our father." She

kept on saying it. She say, “But he did one thing wrong. One thing he shouldn’t have done it—this way we’d all—we would have won the war that the day he accumulated all these people. What for?” She says, “What for? What did they do?”

She didn’t like that he had taken everybody prisoner?

Yes. About the Jews. That this. She said, “Why did he do that? What for?” You couldn’t figure her out. One day she was for Hitler—she was burning, you know, “That Hitler am our father—what he’s doing for the Fatherland.” And then she said it to me, she said, “That’s what he did wrong. Awful, awful.” I said, “What did I do? Tell me.” Can you imagine me doing something? Did I do anything wrong in my life? What?” She said, “That’s it.” She says, “He should have never done it.” She said, “This way he would have won the war.”

She left before you did? Macha? She just...

You see then, after all from Stutthof, all the people were evacuating. Then we were going,...

Right.

...we emptied the place. See—we were emptying the place.

Did you ever hear about the uh, medical experiments, anything like that? Block Eleven in Auschwitz?

We didn’t stay there so long.

You were in Birkenau anyway, you wouldn’t...

I was Birkenau and I was there only for weeks. I didn’t know what was going on actually. We knew already what—the main reason what happened. No, I don’t

know nothing about uh, whatever, I don't know. I heard about it—what was going on about the experiments. The twins. Is that what you're talking about?

Yeah, some—that was...

The twins. Because I know I had uh, some twins from uh, Munkacs. They live here—both of them. They...

People who survived from there?

Yes. Mm-hm. I don't know exactly what they were doing to them. I have no idea. But I know they were in that special place.

Now uh, you left Praust when?

Must be end of January.

And marched? Just marched?

Marched, we marched. And then we got together with people who were, were, were uh, marching away from the Russians too because I heard the Russian ??? who would tell us. We were marching and we saw the, the, the people from the towns are, are going too. They were leaving too, because they were afraid of the Russians—must have been Germans. I don't know where we were. They didn't tell us. We were marching. It was such a big tumult, you know. So we escaped. Three of us.

Were people getting shot? Did you know, did you see anyone get shot?

I want to tell...

All right.

These kids—see the people were going this way and we turned around—we were going—we wanted to go back to the, the Russian, you know. We figured the

Russians will take us in, you know, like uh, naturally we know what's going and what kind of people the Russians are. We said, "We're going." So some of them, you know, the people from the town said, "Where are you going? Where are you going?" You know, German. And we said, "Uh, uh, well we forgot something." You know, it was always some kind of an excuse. We had on the, the—still the uniform—the blue and grey uniform under our coat, you know. We were, you know, we bundled us up because we couldn't leave it no place—that's what we had on. And the shoes, and we had a turban fixed up, you know, because our hair was so short. So we got to a place where a truck came and the people were always asking, where we going, where we going. It looked suspicious. So somehow we saw a truck and we asked would he give us a ride. Where we were, what we were doing, where we were going, I don't—I can't tell you. He says, "Hop in."

Was this a, a German truck?

Yes.

Was this a military truck?

A military truck. So we went in and he picked up some other women too. These women start to uh, talk to us and she could tell, you know, we are not German. She went to the driver and she says uh, "What are these, spies?" In German. "Who are these people here?" So the truck—the driver came to us, he says, "You better get off from here. It's no good that you're here." And he left us off. He knew I think who we were.

Was he a Wehrmacht?

I think so. Mm-hm. Because that woman carried on there—on the, on the truck. She said we are spies. So we were again alone. Then we were going and going and we sat—we went into a house—an empty house. We saw a house, we went in there and we said, “We’re going to wait ‘til the Russians will come.” But in the meantime, before they empty a, a village or a town, there are some Germans—they go look around whoever is there left over. And what do you think, two German SS come in and they find us and they say, “What are you doing here?” We says, “We’re running away from, from the Russians and we wind up here, we’re so tired.” He says, “You better get out of here because the Russians will be close here.” And all of them started to talk Hungarian.

The SS.

The SS. He says in Hungarian, “What are you doing here Hungarians?” So we said to them, “We are three uh, uh, run away from Budapest because the Russians are there.” We didn’t know where to—what else to say to them. “And all of a sudden the ship brought us here and there we wind up.” We give him a story—a blue story. He says, “Well you better get out of here because if you don’t want to get to the Russian”—say “Oh sure, we want to go out of here.” And we went out.

Right away.

Walking with the people, walking with the people.

West again.

West again, with the people. We figured we can’t do it, you know. We cannot do it. We tried and we cannot do it. Two incidents, the third one we didn’t want to take chances. So we were walking. We arrived late at night. It was raining, I

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think. All of a sudden it was dark. I said, “You know what, let’s bury our uniforms first.” I had a Magen David. It, it was dark, we went under a tree. But it was so muddy there, you know, that we took off our dresses and I took off my Magen David. My sister somehow got it for me on my birthday from—somebody was hiding a Magen David and she give a plate of soup, so she borrowed for me on my birthday and I was carrying it then, you know. But it came this time, I took it off. I buried it. We all buried the dresses in the mud good and deep. And we, we had I think on a sweater we had and some kind of skirt, yet, luckily, you know. That’s what we put on and we were going. All of a sudden we got so hungry already. We see some lights, it was something like a bunker or a house—a big house and we go in there. And here we hear already the fighting is going. We saw the fire, you know. You know, it was not far the front. But I don’t know where we were. So, you know, we were afraid. So we went into this house. There were soldiers there. I don’t remember if they were SS or the Wehrmacht. They were already tired, you know. They were exhausted. They had some black coffee and they asked us, “Who are you?” And we told them the story, “We’re Hungarians, Gentiles. My brother and my father is fighting on the front with the Germans. And, and uh, uh, we, we went away—we escaped from the Russians because we lived close by—Budapest—and they were coming so we wind up on a ship and somehow we landed here. We don’t know where we are,” you know. They didn’t say where we are. We didn’t, we didn’t ask. We didn’t want to tell him that, that we are very anxious to know where we are. What’s the difference where we are, you know?

Mm-hm.

What would have been the difference, make it that we know where we are. Maybe for the history would be good. So they give us black coffee to drink and we were sitting there and lying with them, I mean, you know, in their stable. They were so ex...they were fighting. These people were fighting I don't know for how long and they were so exhausted already that they just didn't care, I think. So we were—and that was a sanitary outfit. You know what a sanitary—they were like doctors and—they weren't fighting, they were just like, you know, in a, in a hospital to help out sick people. All of a sudden they were going to Denmark and they ask us if we want to go with them.

To Denmark?

Denmark. I said, "Of course, why not. Why shouldn't we go to Denmark?" What do I know what's Denmark, you know. But get out of here from the front, you know, it's here they're fighting. Who knows what's going to happen yet. "Let's go, we're going." We went on the ship, you know. All it's im...it's something un...unbelievable, isn't it? And there were other civilian people going on there too. It's not only that Germans, you know the, like uh, the soldiers were going. They were going, we were going too. That was already later. It must have been much later than in January. I don't know what happened between then and there. But I know already that must have been in April that we went—maybe I'm going to ask my sister what happened. I, I can't recall.

I'll ask her.

Huh?

I'll ask her.

Ask her, maybe she will remember that these people—we went to dinner. I don't know how many days we lived around there on the ocean or what. They main thing we were, you know, not with the, the SS. We arrived, they put us, I don't know, someplace out of town someplace, you know, in a barracks there. We had our room, they had our room. They were lots of them, Wehrmachts. They, they somehow—we told them we're Hungarians, you know. Somehow they never, never tried to get close with us. It's amazing isn't it? I said to—there was my sister and another girl, Irene, I said, “You know what, let me go into town and see if there is any Jews.” Is there any Jews left over here in Denmark? And for them I told them, “I'm going in town to get some eggs or cheeses,” you know, something for them because whatever they got, you know, on uh, they didn't have enough food. So I told them, I, I, I'm going to go. They give me money, you know, German money. I didn't have any money. And I tried, and I went into a store. I spoke only German and they hated me. German. No, they don't want to sell anything. And here I was afraid to tell 'em I am Jewish. So in some stores—I went into another store. I got some eggs, I got some cheeses. I brought 'em some, I gave it them. We ate it too, you know. Next day I said, “Let me try again. Maybe I'll see on the street a Jew, maybe I'll recognize a Jew.” I couldn't, and here I was afraid of—I says—I said to Irene and to my sister, “Well, we pulled it off so long, why take chances to go to 'em—somebody tell them that I am Jewish. They might shoot us.” So I didn't. And I should have. That was my mistake because after I heard that the Denmarks—how good they were to Jews. But we

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didn't know it. I figured maybe if I see a shul. I couldn't see a shul. Here I didn't—and, and it was a long walk to go there, you know, I had to walk. I was afraid to go to a side street because I wouldn't find my way back. And here these Danish people they wouldn't give me no instruction how to go back because they hated—and I speak—I, I spoke uh, speaking only German. I couldn't speak any other language they should understand me. So I was just going down the main street and looking around for a Jew or a shul and I couldn't find it. So we stayed there with them for four weeks. But as I say, I tried always to go and, you know, maybe, maybe, maybe—I never succeeded. So then they said, “The war is over. The war is over.” As we heard, the war is over. Germany lost the war. That's all we heard. So now you want to go back? So these people said, “We're going back.” I said, “What am I—how are we going to stay here in Denmark? We haven't go anybody.” Can you imagine in a country, you don't know the language, you don't know if you—if they like you or they don't like you. Why stay there? I said, “We're going too. We're going back to, to Germany.” We wind up in Lübeck. You know where, you heard about Lübeck.

Mm-hm.

Then we said goodbye to these—that, that—these people—these Wehrmacht people, to those—because some of them were doctors and the rest of them we called them sanitary people. You know, they were helping like. They—these people didn't fight. These were helping the sick people. So we said goodbye to them. And then we went there, in Germany, and we registered. We heard that there is a Czech camp—people who are left over from the concentration camp

they went to register and there so many days there, every three or four there went a bus to Prague. So there we got a room with my sister and Irene. And we had rations, you know, we got our food. I said, "I got time to go home. Why should I go? I have it good here. How do I know whom and where I find and who I won't find? Let me..." In the meantime, these Germans they lived someplace out in the woods, because they couldn't go home, why, I don't know. And we always went to visit them. They were good—they, they actually saved our lives to be with them.

The same group.

The same group—the doctors—there were a few doctors, and the rest of the guys, you know, were still there. And we were going—we were socializing with them already. Why do you think one day, who do we see? Macha in Lübeck. She says, "How about you girls don't go home and we could stay together." And we said, "Oh no." So she says, "Where are you going? What you doing?" So we told her that here with these people—with those doctors and they're there and there. In the meantime, we went to report her—there was the English government there in Lübeck. They didn't do a goddamn thing. We told her what she was doing, how she was doing to those girls—twenty-five, she slapped 'em on the, you know. And uh, they didn't do anything. In the meantime she was looking for us—we didn't tell her where we live. She went to these people—to those Germans and told them who we are. One day we went to visit them and they told us. They said, "Well, what you did with us—you didn't tell us the truth that you were Jewish." I said—so we said, "Why we wouldn't tell you that we are Jews, won't you go

report us to the SS? Won't you do that?" They says, "Well, I'll give you—I'll have to give you credit—the way you were behaving yourself that you could persuade us and believe that you are Hungarians." I says, "We want to survive, we had to do it." Well—they become there after that friends like. He says, "Look I, I, really—it's amazing, it just wonderful. I don't think we would report you." You know, whatever they said after. But I wouldn't take the chances. So...

Did you go back to Munkacs?

No.

Never went back. You went—now...

That's why I said that I heard that guy was there and, uh...

I see.

...looking for me and I, I—not that I would have thinking seriously with him. To me it was like a little inspiration. You know, I was a young girl, you know, something to look forward to—not to have that life, you know, that monotony life, that who knows, maybe tomorrow I'll be killed. You know, we all had this on our minds. Maybe someday they're going to get a, a, a, a thing that, you know, what do we need her? Why should we feed them? Kill all of us, that's all. So this way it had something, you know, a little bit of inspiration. But I would never think about it, you know, serious because uh, you know, he was nice.

How did you come to the United States?

To United States—well, with an affidavit. I had an aunt and uh, in the mountains—the New York mountains so she sent us an affidavit, that's how we came.

While—so you, you contacted her from Lübeck?

No, from uh, I went from Lübeck—see, we stayed in Lübeck ‘til the last minute—‘til they accumulated all the girls who wanted to go back. I tell you something else. My sister met there a friend—she was from ???, not far from Munkacs. She was going back already, you know. And my sister wrote down—wrote a letter “To whom it may concern.”—we didn’t know who was alive, who is not alive—“I am here with Helen and we’re all right, love Shari.” That’s what my sister wrote with this girl who was going to Czechoslovakia. That girl arrived in Teplice Sanov where my brother lived and my uncle—he should rest in peace, he came out after, you know, the war, after—and my brother and my uncle, all the people who lived there—whoever came from Germany—the girls—they were always standing by to see who’s coming home. And whoever didn’t have anybody, somebody took in that girl and, you know, you know, like a Jewish family that—to help her out ‘til she finds somebody. So my brother he was always standing there by that bus, because the Joint—there was that organization. They told them when the bus is coming in from Germany, you know. All of a sudden a woman—this woman come down and she said, “Is there anybody from Munkacs? Jump out.” So my brother says, “Yes, it’s me.” So he, he—she says, “Well, there is two of your sisters are there in Lübeck.” And my brother looked at my sister’s handwriting—I’m sorry—he fainted, you know. He fell down and fainted. And so my uncle took that letter. So—and my brother-in-law—my sister’s husband—he was in Prague. My brother was a soldier there, you know, they had those Czech army, so they volunteered and they fought with the Russians on—but on the

Czech side you know, and my brother—so right away my brother, you know, they stopped—all of ‘em saw him, you know, they stopped to pick him up and tried to, you know. So he let my brother-in-law know that we are alive. So, don’t ask.

They knew it that—and my—I had another brother, he was in Karlsbad, so he let ‘em know too that, you know, we are alive.

Where is this brother now?

Which one? This one here?

The one who fainted.

Yeah, here. And so they tried to get a taxi, because they didn’t see that we’re not coming. You couldn’t write or telephone—no communication. So they tried to take a taxi, you know, to pay for a taxi they should take—went to Lübeck, you know, because that woman said exactly where we are. But you couldn’t because you had to go—I don’t know how many countries to go through, you know, Russia and—you know, so they couldn’t. So they had to wait ‘til we coming home. So the last bus they said, “That’s it. We’re closing down.” So I said, “Then we have to go home. So let’s see already going to go home.” So I arr...we arrived in Prague and the—and you know, it was for me easy to communicate with the bus driver. He spoke Czech, I spoke Czech—it came back to me. Don’t forget, from 1938 ‘til ’45 I wasn’t allowed to speak Czech by the Hungarians, God forbid, you know. And when, when uh, you were in Czechoslovakia you speak Hungarian they told you—the Czech people, you know, after the war, “You want to speak Hungarian, go to Hungary.” Anyway, so he stopped and I see in Prague on the street—I see a woman from Munkacs. I said to the driver, “Please stop, I

want to go talk to that woman.” So I went on the bus and I says uh, “Do you know if anybody is alive from my family?” And I told her who I am, you know, she was an older person. She says, “Of course.” She says, “Your brother-in-law, your brother.” I says, “How about”—I have two more brothers. Well, I knew already with my parents what happened, but at least, you know, he was young. Says, “Look, I don’t know.” She says, “You know what, there is a...” She told me, “Go easy,” gives me an address, “You go here and here at night.” This is a very famous restaurant in Prague. She says, “All these people from people who came back and who are here...” I says, “From, they—they meet here.” “Why don’t you go there. Maybe you’re going to meet your brother here or your brother-in-law.” In the meantime, the bus took us to the YMCA, you know, there. We had nothing. So they took us there. Okay. I said to my sister, I says, “You know what? Let me go out on the street and look around, maybe if I’ll see somebody.” I go out and I go a few streets and I see a boy from Munkacs. That boy—tell you the truth, I wouldn’t even look after him if I would see him in Munkacs...

Hm.

...but when I saw him I start to hug him and kiss him. You know, I says, “Oh it’s so nice to see somebody from home.” I says, “Tell me, do you know anybody is alive from my bro...” He knew my brothers, he knew my family. He says, “Look,” he says, “I know your two brothers is alive. I know your brother-in-law is alive.” I says, “Go to this place,” you know, he told me the same thing, and you’ll see them. Okay, so I went back to my sister was telling at the YMCA. And I told her whom did I meet. And I said, “We have to go at night to that place.” She says,

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“You know what, I’ll stay here,” you know. We had a little few soap and a little underwear, you know. She says, “I’m going to take care of this here.” She said, “You go.” I says, “Okay, I’m going.” I go there in the evening—I meet there lots of ‘em from Munkacs and I say, “How about my brother? How about my brother-in-law?” There is one guy says, “Look, I have a ticket with your brother-in-law tomorrow afternoon is a very important soccer game is playing. It’s, it’s, you know, very famous.” He says, “You know what, I sacrifice my ticket. I want you to go,” you know. “Here is the ticket, you go tomorrow.” Because nobody knew where my brother-in-law lives. You know, they get together there and that’s as far as they, they go. So I went back and I told that to my sister. I said, “Tomorrow we’re going to go to the soccer field—to the soccer...” you know, it’s a big stadium in Prague. So we go there. We had only one ticket, couldn’t go in—you couldn’t buy another ticket, it was all sold out. I go in. She says, “You know what? You go in.” I was always the ???, you know. I says, “Okay.” I go in there and I see my brother-in-law in a uniform—Czech uniform, you know. He’s sitting there, you know, so excited. I go close to him and I clap on his back. And he turns around, “Oh no, you know, where, where is Sharika?” I said, “She’s outside.” So right away he came there. Now what can I you that reunion? I don’t have to tell you what we went through. I said, “Where is ???,” you know, to my brother—“and Martin. Where is Martin, where is ???, my younger.” So he says, “Your brother’s in Budapest. Martin is in, in Karlsbad.” He said, “??? didn’t come back.” He says, “Come on, let’s go, we’re going home.” He had a beautiful apartment there. He says, “I knew where you are, but I just—I knew you’re alive

but...” We came back maybe six weeks later after they knew that we are alive. So you can imagine that here they couldn’t do anything to get to us. Anyway it was a big reunion. Then, you know, we—they called—he called—yeah, this guy who I met at that rest...you know, on the street—he went to Budapest. And in Budapest he met my brother. You know, it’s, it’s, you know, such a miracle things and it’s such a big city. Exactly he met my brother. And he said, “I met your sister in Prague, they’re in Prague.” So he picked himself up right away and he came. I mean from Budapest to Prague. And the other brother somebody else told him, you know, the, the news goes far. He came in to—you know, when my brother—it’s so hard. When my brother came from Budapest, he picked me up like this and he start to kiss me from the top to the bottom. I’m sorry.

It’s all right.

He said, “I am so happy to see you. At least you’re alive.” ??? You know, to go through these emotions—to see each other yet we didn’t know that we are alive or not. And when my other brother came, he was just holding my hand and he said, “I’m pinching myself. Is it true that you are alive?” and he said, “Thank God.” I don’t know why I, I get so emotional. I think, after all these things, you know, that what I was telling you before, it gets to me.

It’s your family.

No. But, you know, even before, you know, all these things. So that was the reunion with my family, but I still get dreams that the—I’m running and the Germans are coming after me and they try to catch me. And I wake up that my heart is in my throat and, and, you know, I look around and I um, where am I? Is

it true or is it true. I get these horrible dreams once in awhile—not often. I don't even think about it, I don't talk about it.

Is there anytime um, at certain kinds of occasions or even just while you're doing things during the day that something flashes through your memory—you remember something from, from the camps? Does that ever happen?

If they talk about it or I see it on television, you know. It reminds me of, "Oh, I went through this," or "that's what happened to me too," you know.

When you're at a simcha, do you ever think about it?

No, I try not to. I don't talk—I never talk about it, you know. I don't. I get together with people, I don't want to bring up sad things. They're not interested. Maybe they have some other troubles what they go through, you know. Why should I pour out my, my uh, I, I, I don't like to make—feel people that, you know, they should feel sorry for me.

Did you talk about it when you first came to the United States to anybody?

If they ask me.

But only if they ask.

Yeah.

Did they ask?

I, I don't know. I don't remember.

You told your son.

Oh my son, I did tell him about three years ago. Oh yeah, he knows it what I went through.

Did you sit down with one day and say, "I want to tell you what this was about?"

Yes.

Or was it bits and pieces.

It was like bits and pieces too, and you know. Oh yeah, he knows about that.

When uh, you came to the United States, you...

Yeah.

...and you became a citizen of the United States?

Yeah.

Um, where in New York was your aunt living?

She was in the Catskill Mountains. She lived there. I uh, we didn't arrive there.

She didn't come and see us there. She was—she figured—I had an uncle too, and aunt. They both put together the money send after the affidavit. But they weren't so anxious to see us, tell you the truth. So we came here...

To Detroit.

...to Detroit because uh, I had my uncle was here. You know, I told you about it. He survived the concentration camp too, so he came to Detroit. He remarried here, he has two sons and there—so he lived here so we came here. For what reason I don't know why we wind up here. I wish we wouldn't. Would have been better to go out west. It's nicer there because my brother lives there, so I go visit her, you know, and it's beautiful there.

In Los Angeles?

Los Angeles.

??? also...

Oh, I love it. What did you say?

We spent several months there.

Isn't it beautiful?

Uh...

So.

I don't want to take too much more of your time.

I don't know what else can I tell you?

Um, when your, when your son was born, what kinds of uh, plans did you have or do you have for him?

Plans? Like what?

Well, what, what did you hope for in the future for your son?

Well he should be a Jew. And he should remember. And I taught him, I says, "David, we never believed that that could happen to us." I say, "You have that in your mind too. It could happen. It could happen. But be prepared for it." We weren't prepared for it.

Is, is he married?

He's going to get married, yeah.

He's a physician.

Yes.

You must be very proud of him.

I am, I am. Of course. You know, he achieved something that uh, you know, I am proud.

Do you think that you became stronger from all this?

Yes, yes. What I lived through, believe me, what I lived through. All right, I had what to eat here and there, you know, like I told you. But I lived in fear. I lived—because I had to live—it wasn't my choice. Because I was figuring maybe next day, who knows what's going to happen to me. We lived for the moment, for the hour.

Do you think that because your sister was with you, you felt you had to help?

I think because I was with my sister I saved her life. I think I feel that way, because I was the one who was always, you know, helping her, like, you know, when she was in Stutthof, she was sick with the ear infection. And here I couldn't help her. And then when, when in Praust when she was going out to work and I took her out from there because she looked terrible. That sun—first of all, you know, I guess the people didn't have enough vitamins in themselves—and to stay on the sun, they were burned. They, they had blotches all over—that sun blotches on their faces. You know, they looked terrible. And that I pulled her out from there—I think that I helped her, you know, that, that—because she is here. And then she found out what happened to her little boy, so you can imagine what she carried on, you know. That was Eva's brother.

Are you close with Eva too?

Very much, I love her. She is like my daughter. I'm so close to her.

And they, they live nearby. Your sister too?

My sister lives in uh, Livonia. Not far. You know with a car nowadays, not far—twenty minutes down there. No, we are a close family.