

RUTH ELIAS

(fin bobine 64)

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LANZMANN: Where did you live before the war?

R. ELIAS: I was living in Czechoslovakia, in a town called Moravska Ostrava

C.L. It's a famous town.

E. Yes. Coal. It's all black. Plenty of Jews; a nice life.

C.L. Many Jews?

E. I think; I'm not sure today. I don't want to give you any numbers, but I went to a Jewish elementary school, which means if there was a Jewish elementary school there were enough Jews to visit it, and to hold it up.

C.L. And which language did you speak in your family?

E. In our family we talked Czech, but my father sent me first of all to a Jewish elementary school and afterwards to a German high school because of the education. I don't know what his reason was, but at home we talked Czech.

C.L. You talked Czech?

E. Yes.

C.L. It was rather seldom among the Jews to talk Czech.

E. Very seldom.

C.L. Because they used to talk German, as a matter of fact.

E. Yes, for instance the newspapers my father read were German. He was brought up, of course, in (Kaunt--kar Osterreich?), he was born there.

C.L. And what was the profession of your father?

E. My father had a factory for sausages.

C.L. Sausages?

E. Yes, and on one of the main streets of the town we had a big restaurant - a 'quick-buffet', I would say - and we had 3 shops...

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C.L. Yes, you said your father had a sausage factory.

E. Yes.

C.L. Were they kosher sausages?

E. No, it was not kosher. We had 3 stores and the factory, around 40 people working, ... quite wealthy.

C.L. Yes. And in the Jewish school, what did you learn? Hebrew?

E. I also learned the Hebrew 'aleph-beth', of course, but it was Czech and German, a double-language school. I was brought up with 2 languages, Czech and German.

C.L. And do you remember, ... how old were you (excuse me for asking) when the deportations for Theresienstadt started?

E. When the deportations for Theresienstadt started I was 19.

C.L. Do you remember vividly how it happened?

E. Very vividly.

C.L. Could you describe it?

E. If you don't mind I will tell you a little about when the

Germans entered Czechoslovakia in March 1939.

My father had a foreman working in his factory - he grew up in the factory. The Germans occupied Czechoslovakia, and the very next day this man was in the door of the factory and didn't allow my father to enter any more. He appeared in a SA uniform with a swastika on his arm, and told him 'The factory is not yours any more'. I can see my father's face. My father went away. Afterwards we also had to leave our very big flat and had to take another small one. It was just until September 1939, and it was only in my home town, in Moravska Ostrava that in September '39 they took all the Jewish men...

C.L. To Nisko.

E. To Nisko. You are very well informed.

C.L. Your father was deported to Nisko?

E. My father was not deported to Nisko. The firm belonged to my father and his brother - two brothers - and my father decided he was not leaving his family and we ran away from Moravska Ostrava. My father, with plenty of money, bought false identity cards without the 'J' for 'Jude' and we were living in the countryside with these false papers, working on several farms as agricultural day workers from September '39 till our deportation to Theresienstadt on 4th April 1942.

How did they come on us that we were Jews? Somebody told them that there were Jews in Pozorzihy Ubrenna (?). It was a very, very tiny village. And off we went to the transport to Theresienstadt. I want only to tell you about this little

village: it was near Brno (Brünn), a big town in Czechoslovakia, and I sometimes went into Brno to learn something. I was brought up in a wealthy house, I knew how to play the piano but nothing more, and I started to learn to knit mesh on a machine. There I met my first husband. I came to Theresienstadt; he was already there, we were not married beforehand.

C.L. This means you met somebody...

E. I met somebody whom I afterwards married, to be correct.

Do you want me to tell about Theresienstadt now?

C.L. I would like you to tell me about the deportation, the trip, everything which happened. Had you heard already about Theresienstadt?

E. We heard that the transports were leaving for Theresienstadt. What is Theresienstadt? How is Theresienstadt? We didn't know. We couldn't imagine how it was.

We were allowed to take 30 kilos each, if I am not mistaken - one piece of luggage. That was with our clothes and our needs. That was all. Everything else had to be left behind. Of course, what we had in our flat and everything, my father started to give to Czech Christian families to hide things away. I didn't see anything of it when I came back, or very, very little.

C.L. The property, the money? You took nothing?

E. Nothing.

C.L. Did the whole family go to Theresienstadt?

E. My uncle, that is to say the brother with whom my father shared the firm, had to stay in Prague because - no, in Moravska

Ostrava - because he was very ill, he had cancer and he was on a cancer station, but all the other family - my sister, my elder sister, my father and my mother and the wife of the brother, all came together to Theresienstadt.

C.L. The station - at the time the trains were not going inside the town. You went to Litomerice or to...

E. No, to Bochoczewitz(?). We came to Bochoczewitz and then we had to go by foot into Theresienstadt. We were separated. We were living in Caserne, where the army was stationed before. To be very short, Theresienstadt was a military town, and there were quarters for the military. The houses were for Czechs who were on service for this army town; the houses were emptied by the Czechs, and all was empty. We started to occupy. We were living separated, men from women, in these living quarters for the military.

C.L. Were you living in barracks?

E. No, we were living in the Caserne.

C.L. Which one?

E. I was in the Hamburger Caserne and my father went to the Bruchlaby(?) - no, excuse me, to the Sudetencaserne.

C.L. Was it a shock, Theresienstadt?

E. My feeling, and I can only tell about myself - I was very young and I found my boyfriend there.

C.L. He was already your boyfriend?

E. He was already my boyfriend, before I left to Theresienstadt, so my angle of viewing of coming to Theresienstadt was quite

different from other people's. I can say, somehow I was happy to be near my boyfriend. Of course, from the other side I started to be hungry - and never in my life I had been hungry - because there was no food. But in your youth you don't feel so very hard... when you remember back, now when I am grown up, I see plenty of things which I couldn't see when I was young. And it was a lucky thing...

C.L. Was it a shock to leave suddenly, only among Jews?

E. Not among Jews. The shock was, you were on the ground, with two mattresses on the floor. You had one cover, and this was your space for living, with 30 other women in the room.

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E. So we were in a very, very big room, living all together, and you can imagine that people were talking. people were running people were quarreling. I think that to live together with 30 people in one room was for me, as a young girl, the shock. The shock was for me that I couldn't see my father, I couldn't see my fiancé because it was strictly forbidden for men to come to the women's quarters and women to come to the men's. But somehow my boyfriend took some work to carry things to the women's quarter, so one day yes and one day no, I saw him. We were 7 days in Theresienstadt when I got the call to a

transport. My sister got the same call and my aunt, and my mother.

C.L. A call to a transport?

E. For a transport. we were 7 days in Theresienstadt. I wanted very badly to get in touch with my father, because I wanted to know if my father was in the transport too. And my boyfriend, who was able to be the connection between us told us 'Yes, your father is also in the transport and he lets you know that all of us are going to the transport because he was not feeling well.' I forgot to tell you that my father had T.B. and it was very hard for him to breathe in Theresienstadt - why, I don't know, he was living with a pneumothorax(?), which means only one lung was working. I got a very high temperature running that evening, and I got ill. The doctor came and told me I had angina and that I was not able to go to any transport which had to leave in another 2 or 3 days.

C.L. Did you know the meaning of the transport?

E. No.

C.L. You knew only that it was a transport for the East?

E. It was a transport for the East, that is all we were told.

C.L. It was frightening, the East?

E. No, you had no imagination of what would happen because you heard something was going on in the East, in Poland - we knew that it was East Poland, but you couldn't imagine what was going on, you were just...

The doctor told me 'You are not able to be transported', and

because I was not 21, I was only 19½, my whole family mustn't leave with my illness. Because I am ill and can't go, my whole family mustn't go because my family have to care for me until the age of 21.

C.L. This was a regulation?

E. Yes, it was a regulation: 'Transportunfähig'. Because I was not 'volljährig' (I don't know how you call it in English) - until the age of 21.

C.L. A majeur.

E. I was very glad about it because I didn't want to leave Theresienstadt because of my boyfriend.

C.L. He was not in the transport?

E. He was not in the transport.

My boyfriend came to visit me, and he ran to my father to give him this message. Then came the message back: 'even if you are ill you have to come with your family. I can't breathe here and you will be all right.' Again the doctor said 'You can't go, I can't let you go,' so my boyfriend came and said 'It is very easy; we will marry'. I asked him how; 'Don't worry about it, we will marry'. An hour later he came in with a Rabbi. My neighbour on the floor gave me her wedding ring.

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E. My fiancé came with a Rabbi and my neighbour, who was on the next 2 mattresses on the floor, took off her wedding ring so

that the Rabbi could say the magic words ' ,
'Herewith you are married', and I was married. The very next morning the transport had to leave, and I said 'My father is leaving and I have to tell him I am married'. I am telling you this with this very naive voice because it was a very naive thinking - I didn't think deeper. I just thought 'I am married, and I must tell my father'. I got permission to go to the men's quarters, to leave the quarters where I had been living. I couldn't enter, it was forbidden, so I asked some men who were behind the fence, 'Please be so kind as to call my father'. My father came to the barbed wire fence, and I told him 'Father, I am married and tomorrow I am not going with you.' I will never in my life forget the expression on my father's face. He started to cry. I didn't know - instead of my father should be glad and it is a joy for him that his daughter is married, he started to cry, and I didn't understand why. Today I understand it very well. My father cried, and whenever I am dreaming of my father or thinking of my father, that's - I can only see a man crying, I never see this nice man because he is crying. For years, that's the last picture only I remember of him. My father somehow gave me his blessing, and I said goodbye and that was the last time I ever saw my father. I never saw him again in my life.

In the morning my sister went, and my mother went, and my aunt went. To everyone I said goodbye; I was crying, because it was a goodbye. But what was behind this goodbye I couldn't think

because it was out of imagination. I only felt somehow it was goodbye. And I stayed with my husband in Theresienstadt.

C.L. All the others went.

E. All the others went. Nobody stayed.

C.L. And they never came back.

E. My husband entered the 'Ghettowache' in Theresienstadt. That was a corps of watchmen, and with that he had the occasion to come and visit me, but we couldn't live together.

C.L. The chief was Kurt Lowenstein.

E. Yes. I forgot the name. They had uniforms, they had caps, and they were watching the quarters. They had to be responsible for order in Theresienstadt.

I started to work as a nurse. I learnt to be a nurse, because somehow I loved the medical side.

C.L. I would like to ask a question. Marriages were not forbidden in Theresienstadt?

E. No, it was not forbidden. I married, and I also carried the name of my husband, but it was nowhere registered.

C.L. Nowhere registered? ^{- fin / image -} Not even in Theresienstadt?

E. In Theresienstadt I don't know if it was registered, yes or no. I can't tell you. I carried my husband's name, but if it was registered I have no idea. I didn't care about it. Youth, you know. It's all connected with youth.

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E. So, I was working as a nurse, which means I was learning because I didn't know what it is to be a nurse...

C.L. Did many marriages take place in Theresienstadt, or was it rather rare?

E. No, there were plenty of marriages.

C.L. Till a certain period?

E. As I remember, yes. I was together with several couples. It was allowed to marry in Theresienstadt, no problem.

C.L. Of course it was a 'Selbstverwaltung'.

E. Yes, it was a 'Selbstverwaltung', just as you said.

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E. So marriages were allowed. There were plenty of marriages. As I told you before, I started to work as a nurse and after a certain time I was ordered to be in the geriatric department, the women's department.

C.L. For old women?

E. Old women. And don't forget, I was 19½ or 20. When I was on night duty, at least 2 or 3 died in my arms. Where did they die? On the floor, with the 2 mattresses, in the cold because it was not heated, and in misery, calling for their daughters or

their grandchildren and telling me about them. It was just too much for me to bear. I was very hungry, I had nothing to eat, only the daily ration. My husband was hungry, his parents were hungry, and I decided I can't bear this misery any longer and I am going to be a cook. I am going to be near food!

C.L. Yes, I understand that we come back to this; it's funny, because I had just written here: 'The old people', because I wanted you to talk about this. Do you remember when the German Jews arrived in Theresienstadt? The old ones?

E. Yes, but I was not working any more. In this geriatric department, I was only there for...

C.L. Could you describe how they lived? Because they came with illusions to Theresienstadt. They were even told you can rent a room in the sun, and so on.

E. I beg your pardon, I didn't understand that.

C.L. The Germans told them 'You will come to Theresienstadt and you can even have a room in the sun. You have to pay specially for this', and so on.

E. Again I must disappoint you a little, because I was working as a nurse in this geriatric department, and afterwards, when I got out of it I had no contact with the older people.

C.L. How long did you work in this geriatric department?

E. Around 3 or 4 months maximum, because I couldn't bear it. The most difficult thing was the nights, to go over the night duty with people dying. I was confronted with death for the first time, and I was not even 20. It was not one death a night; it fell on me, 2 or 3 people, and I had to pick them

up and carry them away to the 'Leichenhalle'.

C.L. The corpses hall.

E. The corpses, yes of course. And I had to make a package out of what was left over, because the next day relatives came to fetch it. I couldn't cope with this.

C.L. This was in winter '42/'43?

E. I think it was around October, November '42.

C.L. I read that at this time 4 000 or 5 000 people died monthly.

E. Yes, it was terrible.

C.L. How did they live, these old people?

E. As I told you, the same as we lived: on 2 mattresses on the floor. Between the mattresses there was only a very narrow gangway to the next mattress. So you had a space of 1m10 to your length, that was all you had. The old people had that too. I just told you, I ran away from it. My husband's parents were in Theresienstadt, and they were also in their quarters with elderly people - in other words, I had to visit them and I nursed them until one died - the father died, and the mother went afterwards with us.

C.L. How long did they succeed to survive?

E. I think about one year.

C.L. I am not talking about the parents, but the old people generally.

E. You can't generalise, because there were also old people who afterwards went with us to Auschwitz. That means they survived.

C.L. But mostly they came to die?

E. Don't forget there is another important moment I remembered just now: when you are 20, in your eyes people of 45, 50 are old people. It is relatively thinking.

C.L. Yes, but I was talking about the people of 70, because many very old people came.

E. These very old people didn't hold out. They couldn't. To be taken out of the comfort of your surroundings, which you have been used to, your whole life, and to be put into this very, very big room with several tens of people- it is impossible to live it over because first of all your personality breaks. The disappointment in living, and then all the thoughts of 'What am I living for? Why am I living?' And the moment you lose the will to live...

C.L. And the hope.

E. ...people die, if they are 40, if they are 20 or if they are 70. If you have no perspective in front of you, you can't go on. When your spirit dies, you die. And this was what happened, why so many died. That is my personal translation.

C.L. You are completely right. But this was a policy of the Germans, to have them die.

E. Of course. When I read books today about what happened, and when I start to think, from our side we were just dancing to the German's music, I think, because they made their research, they made the programme, and they just wanted it to be like this. And they broke us. They succeeded in their plans, in what they were doing, because they broke us - and from their side it was

programmed. Only we didn't know about it.

C.L. For me it was always one of the most horrible...

E. But I will tell you a very hard story of what happened to me.

I told you my father was a very clever and intelligent person; he didn't go to high schools or to college, but he was a very practical, logical-thinking man. One day a card reached me in ^{TEREZIN} Theresienstadt. Afterwards I could only imagine what my father was doing - he threw a card out of the wagon when he was transported to Poland. No, excuse me, it was not that. A card reached me saying these words: 'We are in Poland. They wanted to separate your mother from me ...'

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E. I don't know how long it was when my parents went to Poland, but one day a card reached me at Theresienstadt; one day when I was walking on the street a gendarme, a Czech, came to me and gave it to me so that nobody could see, because it was strictly forbidden. Even he could sit in jail if somebody had seen him passing me over something, because he was strictly forbidden to get in touch with prisoners. Until today I don't know how he knew that the card belonged to me. I have no idea. But it was the last card from my father, and the words were: 'We arrived in Poland. They separated women from men. Your mother didn't want to go from my side and was shot in

front of my eyes. Now I will search for Edith' (my sister). 'If I do not find her I will commit suicide'.

I got this card and didn't know what was going on. Why were they separated? Or why was my mother shot when she didn't want to leave his side? When I started to operate the words, the sentences, it didn't make sense to me.

C.L. How is this possible?

E. I don't know the translation of the words because they were frank words; today I know they were frank words, today I know what this card meant, but to be in the ghetto and to get such a card, you couldn't... you couldn't... I don't know why...

C.L. How did he succeed? Where did he die, in Auschwitz?

E. No, no. He did not die in Auschwitz. It was in... on the way to Treblinka, or something like that.

C.L. Treblinka?

E. Yes, because there was no Auschwitz yet in '42.

C.L. Oh yes, there was.

E. There was already, but the Czech transports didn't arrive there. They went to Lodz, to old ghettos.

C.L. Yes, maybe you are completely right, maybe they were shipped to Lodz. It's absolutely true. There were transports from Theresienstadt that went to Lodz.

E. It was not yet Auschwitz. Auschwitz started in September '43, from Theresienstadt. The Czechs from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz started in September '43.

C.L. Yes, you are completely right. There were transports that were

shipped to Lodz. That's true.

E. So that was the last card from my father. We just couldn't...
Is he writing in code? What does he mean? I can only tell
you the translation of cards arriving: people threw
out cards from wagons, and they arrived in Theresienstadt. We
didn't know, we didn't believe. We couldn't believe.

C.L. So you learnt in Theresienstadt, in the ghetto, that your
mother had been shot?

E. That was a... And I told you my father was together with my
uncle, who had no children and I was his beloved niece. Into
Theresienstadt came the Jewish news from the Jewish Communities,
which still worked in the towns...

C.L. In Prague?

E. In Prague, and one day I got - but I didn't read it, it didn't
interest me - the Jewish news from Prague. One day I got one
of these news to my hand, and I opened and saw that my uncle had
died in Moravska Ostrava.

C.L. And the newspaper was called - wait a minute...

E. Zhirovskia Spravi(?)

C.L. Yes, in Czech, but in German...

E. Judische Nachrichten.

C.L. Judische Nachrichtenblatt.

E. Judisches Nachrichtenblatt. So I learnt from this newspaper -
you know, when I came back and started to think how my father
died, so I thanked God that this uncle had died normally, in
his bed, from cancer. So that was what I heard of my family,
and of course I couldn't imagine that... I knew that my mother

died, but I didn't know what happened to my father. I didn't know what happened to my sister, if they were living or not living. I was sure they were living, I was sure of it somehow. I got an occupation in the kitchen.

C.L. Let's come back to the issue. I would like you to repeat, because it was at the end of the reel, that you said you wanted to work near the food. Repeat it again, please.

E. I'll tell you something: people in misery act like animals. That is instinct, and when I today listen to people, they were doing this, and this in concentration camps - to be able to tell it afterwards, I don't believe it. I'm sorry to say I don't believe it, because I saw the animal instinct in people. All your mask - you had to unmask, you had to stay what you were, you couldn't act, because in all those surroundings it just came to you that you couldn't act, you had to show your true face. One of the instincts in me was food; 'Selbsterhaltung', to hold yourself up, is only possible when you are eating. You will afterwards hear how I was eating and how I was stealing food, but all was instinct to be able to live.

C.L. It was the main...

E. Yes, nothing else. I can tell you that when women came together and started to talk, we were cooking with our mouths - because we had nothing to cook. But you started to talk about how to cook this, and how to cook that. And you were talking about food, because this was the main problem - to survive, to eat, to have strength.

(E.) All these thoughts are thoughts of today, as I told you.

Instinct is not the thought of today. I said I was only acting instinctively: I wanted to be near food, so I started to try to get into the kitchen. Getting into the kitchen to work was very hard.

C.L. Difficult?

E. Very difficult, because everyone wanted to work in the kitchen. Everyone wanted to be near food. I had luck. I am a kind of musician; one day I came to a room where an accordion was. I started to play the accordion and sing, and in this room was a man called Schneider. I have forgotten his surname (= first name?). He told me 'I need you in the kitchen because you know how to sing, how to be 'fröhlich'.

(N.d.T.)

C.L. Fröhlich?

E. Yes. The very next day I started to work - hard work, very hard work, but I started to eat and I started to steal. I started to steal, not to sell it, but my husband had to eat, his parents had to eat. We had to steal.

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E. Again, I can't fetch it that people are telling that they wanted to live to be able to tell afterwards. I didn't know what would be afterwards; you know what 'Carpe diem' means?

C.L. Yes.

E. That's what we had to do. 'Carpe diem'. I didn't know what would be the next hour, I couldn't say what would be the next day. I didn't want to live to be able to tell people, I wanted to live because I was young, and I wanted to live. That's it: I wanted to live, nothing else. You will see afterwards - I have got a very long story - but you will see how the will to live is so very strong, without any thoughts behind it. I don't believe in thoughts in misery like this.

C.L. And in the kitchen you were singing?

E. How I was singing! And all the people with me were singing. We were singing; we were getting up at 4 o'clock, and it was hard work to clean the kettles where food was cooked, and afterwards to carry these barrels full of food. We had to carry them, we had to be strong. And we were singing, we were singing so much that afterwards I was singing in the Opera - in the 'Verkaufte Braut'. We were singing in Freizeit, and...

C.L. What were you singing?

E. All the Czech songs, and the 'Schlagers', the hits from this time. But what we were singing most in Czechoslovakia were a couple of Czech 'satires', Woskowitz and Verri(?). They are very, very famous until today in Czechoslovakia. One of them is living in America, the other in Czechoslovakia today. They had a theatre and they sang about good political satire. Also at this time, before the war, they were singing against Hitler and so on. All their songs, they were like hymns, they were

our leading songs.

C.L. Could you sing again now?

E. I will sing; if you will allow, I will take the accordeon
and accompany myself, ok?

C.L. Yes, I would like this very much.

E. Do you want it now, or afterwards?

C.L. As you wish.

E. So you want to stop now?

C.L. Maybe you will do it now.

E. Ok.

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E. Could you stop for a second, please? I must play it once again.

RUTH ELIAS 9a

(Ruth Elias chante en Tchéque)

E. I will give you now a free translation into English.

C.L. Yes, or in German.

E. 'Everything goes when it is possible. Even if the time is so
very hard, some kind of humour is still in our hearts. Every
day we have to move back and forth, and only in 30 words we
can write home, but tomorrow time is beginning again. The time
is coming nearer when we will again pick up our (penpickeli?)

and go home again, and everything goes when you want that it should go. The day will come and we will laugh about the ruins of the ghetto'. That is the content of this song. It is a song written in a very slow march tempo, and it is full of hope when you think about the words. That's what we sang there, and everyone who went through Theresien and will hear this song, will sing the words with you.

C.L. Did the German Jews sing it too?

E. No, not in German.

C.L. I mean the German Jews of Theresienstadt.

E. That I can't tell you, because the text was only in Czech.

You mustn't forget that we had there, and especially from Germany came very good composers and singers and artists and so on. We had people making music, chamber music, and popular music. There was a café and we had to sing in varieties and so on... I was not in a variety, there were much bigger and more famous people, and they made an opera. They had soloists from the opera; the conductor was a Rumanian Jew, a very wonderful Jew - Rafael Schechter - and I started to sing in the ' ' , 'Die verkaufte Braut', 'The bought Bride' from Smetternach(?) . The soloists were German Jews, because they were famous, and wonderful artists.

C.L. Were there other songs, I mean Jewish songs, that you used to sing at the time?

E. When we came together we used to sing several songs.

(Elle chante)

E. We didn't know what 'Kadema' meant, and there were two words so it was very, very easy.

C.L. Two words of Hebrew?

E. Yes, two words of Hebrew, so it was very easy to remember.

Then when we gathered together with... Of course, there were the zionist Jews, and when we gathered together there was one song that until today we sing in Israel too:

(elle chante)

That's when we were coming together. And today I know there was only one sentence, ' (en hebreu) ',
'It is nice to be friends together'.

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C.L. When you want to go, you go very naturally.

E. (chante)

E. That's a song which, the more I sing it the more I get into the meaning of it. I am sure the man who wrote it - I don't know who wrote it, the words and the music - he just wrote it because it was just a situation, but the meaning of it: 'You will go away and laugh about the ruins of the ghetto' - that's something. And it was forgotten. I hope it will live.

You know, we sang; we were young, and we sang. When I remember the kitchens, when we were working and singing there, I can't

help telling another story.

Once a week in Theresienstadt we got soup and a 'Czeski knödlig', which means a 'Dampfknödel' in German, I don't know how to say it in English. It was a dumpling, something like that, filled with (?). For this you had to make yeast dough, and very early in the morning. It was very hard work, we had to get up to make these dumplings. We loved to steal a little bit of dough. Why? Because we put a little bit of sugar, in the living quarters, in it, and a little bit of marge, so it was a good dough, and we baked it and had a wonderful cake. To have a little bit of such a good cake was... How rich you were when you could have it! So what did I do? I had such a very big apron, and I put the dough behind this apron. I wanted to leave the kitchen, and it all had to be hot because the yeast cake had to go up. So I wanted to leave the kitchen. Some of my colleagues saw me when I put the dough behind the apron, and they said 'We won't let Ruth out; we will see what the yeast dough does when it starts to grow'. And it started to grow, here, behind my apron, and I wanted to leave to put the dough into my living quarters. All the time I had to clasp here, and I was growing and growing and all the kitchen was laughing. You see, there was humour in our heart, just as in the hymn which I sang. Afterwards I came to my living quarters and had to scrape down, because everything was sticky from the yeast. That was when you were young, and you had imagination of what you were doing and how you were doing it,

and so on.

In Theresienstadt - I don't want to go into big details, but after a time it was a little better: you could meet men, it was not such a strict separation, and because my husband was a 'Ghettowachtmann' (it was summer '43) he was privileged to get a little separation underneath the roof, so we just - I don't know where from, but he took some wood and we made a little room for us and we could live together.

C.L. So you succeeded in living together?

E. And that was a very big privilege, but we didn't live only he and me, but we were two couples living together.

C.L. In the same room.

E. In the same room. So of course we had very strict arrangements: during the day every one of us was working, and he was allowed to enter or not to enter the room - during the day, yes - so I started to have some married life with my husband, which we didn't have before. We had met sometimes, somewhere, in a very dark corner, but that was all. It was just summer. One day I saw that I was pregnant. Until this time it was allowed to have abortions, and when I saw I was pregnant I went to a doctor to have an abortion, because we couldn't see (ourselves) having a family in Theresien.

C.L. This was a rule: abortion?

E. Yes, it was a rule. I am not sure if it was a rule, but abortions were made. If it was a rule that you had to have abortions,...

C.L. No, I mean the rules before the (?).

E. Abortions were made, yes.

C.L. But there were not many children born in Theresienstadt.

E. No.

C.L. Very, very few.

E. Very few. And when I asked to have an abortion I was told it was just several days ago forbidden to make abortions.

C.L. Do you know why?

E. No.

C.L. Who forbade it? The Germans?

E. The Germans, yes. And the doctors who made abortions were to be punished, or something. Of course everyone was afraid, so nobody wanted to do it. We found ourselves, my husband and I, with a call to a transport to the East.

C.L. Both of you?

E. Both of us, yes. Because we were a couple. I asked doctors, 'Please, make me an abortion quickly because in a week's time I have to leave for the East and I am pregnant'. Nobody wanted to.

C.L. When was this, exactly?

E. It was in November, or beginning of December '43. The beginning of December. Nobody wanted to make an abortion. I had no other chance than to go pregnant to the transport to the East.

I think there are plenty of books written and plenty of films made of how people were loaded into big wagons where animals were transported. We were also loaded into such a wagon; every

one of us had a little luggage with some food and some clothes-
more we were not allowed to take. In this wagon was one bucket
for water, ^{in image} and one bucket for W.C.

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RUTH ELIAS 11

E. So this time it reached us, the transport to the East, and I
knew I was pregnant and couldn't do anything to help myself.
We were loaded into these wagons for cattle; one bucket for
W.C., one bucket for water. The doors were closed, and up there
somewhere there was a window closed with barbed wire; the W.C.
bucket was full so we all perched in one corner. Somebody tried
to empty this bucket through the little window. With us were
children, ^{with us were} and elderly people. Children crying. This terrible
odour. We could sleep inside only one part, for sleeping, and
the other part was for sitting in the corner. It went for 2
days and one night.

C.L. In wintertime?

E. It was December, but it was warm inside because we heated it up
with our body temperature.

One evening the train came to a stop. - the next day in the evening
The doors were opened and there was a terrible screaming: 'Out,
out, out!' We were shocked; we didn't know what was going on,
or where we were. We saw only SS with dogs, and we saw in the

distance symmetric lights, but we didn't know where we were; or what the thousands of lights meant. We only heard this shouting: 'Out! Out! Out!'

C.L. 'Raus!'

E. Yes, exactly. And 'Schnell! Schnell! Schnell!'. Out we came from these wagons. We had to line up, and there were some people with striped uniforms. We didn't know what the stripes were, and I asked one in Czech, 'Where are we?'. It was a Pole who understood my Czech, and he told me 'Auschwitz'. But it didn't mean anything to me. What was Auschwitz? I didn't know anything about Auschwitz. Overnight we were put into some barracks. We were numbered.

The very next day in the morning we were (pushed?) into a huge bathroom. From the ceiling there were showers. First of all, outside, we had to get rid of all our clothes, men and women together. Then we were (pushed?) into this bathroom. Today I know we had very great luck, that instead of Zyklon gas, out came water.

C.L. Yes, but your case was a very special one, the case of this transport coming from Theresienstadt. There was no selection at the beginning for the gas chamber.

E. There was no selection at all.

C.L. This you must explain, what was the (Czech family?).

E. Yes, I have said that we didn't know until we came into the camp. We had to wash ourselves in the freezing cold water, in December. The 24th, it was just Christmas time. We were given - I was

given, I can only talk for myself - wooden shoes and no underwear. I had a very thin dress, and over it a very thin coat. We were not given striped uniforms. We were separated, men from women, but we were led into a so-called 'family camp', 'Familienlager B-Zwei-B'. That was the only camp in Auschwitz where men and also women were together. There were children there, that means all the people from Theresien, as we came, without any selection beforehand. We came to this family camp.

C.L. So-called family camp.

E. Yes. In this camp there was already a transport which had left Theresienstadt in September, which means 3 months before us.

Our own people started to tell us -

C.L. People that you knew already?

E. Yes, some of them of course... -where we were, and what they were doing there, and so on.

What shall I tell you?

Morning: one black coffee, without sugar.

Dinnertime: a plate of soup. If you had luck there were several pieces of vegetable floating in it.

Evening: coffee, 2 or 3 slices of bread. If you had luck there was margarine or jam or something.

In the morning we had to go to work. We were taking stones from one place to another. The next day we took it from the other place to the first place. So you did work which had no sense, they wanted to kill your personality, your thinking. They wanted to kill you. It was freezing cold. No food. The W.C. was

a big building separated by a piece of cloth. On one side there was a row of wooden seats with a hole in them; on one side, men, and on the other side, women. That was the latrines. Paper was not there.

C.L. There was none?

E. No, where from? But sometimes you had luck and there was weed big enough.

C.L. Excuse me?

E. There was weed outside. But in winter there was no weed. We had no underclothes. I've talked about food, the W.C.

Washing: a big barrack. There was a row of taps with cold water running out. Underneath the taps there was what cattle drink from - one big bowl on both sides of the taps where you could wash yourself. Opposite you a man. You just unclothed - no shame, you just unclothed because you wanted to be clean. Again, as I told you before, it was the instinct. Soap? There was no soap, you just took some pieces of sand and scrubbed yourself and you had the feeling when the water washed it down that you were clean. Because you dirtied your skin, and afterwards it came off and you were clean, so it was only the imagination. Because I was pregnant, and my body started to grow, I was ashamed of my body. I got up very early in the morning and only prayed to God that no man would be in the washing room, because I wanted to wash but I didn't want a man to see my body. That was a terrible time for me. My belly grew; I didn't know what would be, and I wanted to live. I started to be

desperate, and somehow I started to sing about death, and to sing about... if I would be able to live. I never had this...

Boite (72?)

RUTH ELIAS 12

E. We arrived, and we were told 'In Auschwitz they are burning people', and that it was a 'Vernichtungslager'.

C.L. You were told this?

E. Yes. Into the camp came people with striped uniforms, men from the 'Männerlager' with services: they brought in food and other things, I'm not sure what they brought in...

C.L. Yes, because this Czech 'Familienlager' was in the middle of the men's Lager.

E. Yes, it was not far away. They came in and were telling us it was a 'Vernichtungslager' and there are crematoriums and so on. We didn't believe them.

C.L. And the Czechs who came before you...

E. They also told us but they didn't believe too, because until you see anything...

C.L. But you were 400 metres from the crematorium.

E. You don't believe. We were all together, the people who came. People died, of course, every day, but we were together and nobody was taken away and nobody was burnt. We didn't believe it until you felt the smell. It was March 7th.

C.L. 1944.

E. 1944. Yes. When all the September transport - the transport that came in 3 months before us in the family camp - the whole transport was loaded on wagons, trailers, and taken away from the 'Familienlager'. We who remained were closed up in the barracks, and it was strictly forbidden for us to go outside. We didn't know what was going on until we heard the 'Hatikva' and the Gdedn ovmoi (?).

C.L. And the...?

E. The Gdedn ovmoi(?). That's a Czech hymn. And the Hatikva.

C.L. You heard it?

E. Of course, because the people were brought to a camp near us, and from there - it was pitch dark, I don't know what time it was, perhaps midnight - they were taken out from there. The moment we heard the Hatikva being sung we knew these people were going to die.

C.L. They sung the Hatikva inside the gas chamber?

E. It was something hard to tell. We were inside the barracks and we knew something was going on, something was happening to our people and we couldn't help them. That was a terrible night. The next day again people from the MÄnnerlager with the striped uniforms told us the first Czechs were burnt. Then we started to believe that there were crematoriums, but of course we couldn't imagine gas. You could feel the smell, it was hanging over...

C.L. It is unbelievable, what you say, because when one sees

Auschwitz today it's really 400 metres from the place where you were and the crematoria.

E. Now, today, I know they were burnt, but when it happened - again, nobody told you, but you felt something was going on and you were not sure. The struggle in believing was something terrible.

C.L. What do you mean, 'the struggle in believing'?

E. 'Is it true? Can it be true?' You struggled, and told yourself 'This can't be true. This can't be true'.

C.L. Even in Auschwitz?

E. Even in Auschwitz. Until you were sure of something, you couldn't believe.

We were in the camp, we worked. I must tell you, I was in block no 6. In block no 6 there was the orchestra of the camp, the men's orchestra. Every time, when the SS came, the men had to play. There were several instruments. They were making rehearsals. It happened several times, when SS were drunk - I must tell you beforehand, I forgot something: in Block no 6 there were mostly young women. I came to Block no 6 because when I came to Auschwitz my tummy was not growing, I was still slim. They just took the young women and put them into block no 6. It very often happened that drunk SS, in the evenings came into block no 6. First of all they woke up the orchestra and the music had to play; in came the SS with their bicycles, and then they started to climb up and look for nice women and take them out, and the girls had to sleep with them. I was

living on the 3rd floor, and when we saw the SS coming we went to the wall because we didn't want them to see us. We were all afraid of it. The girls were screaming, and that was terrible, terrible.

So I told you my bed was on the 3rd floor; my friend, Ruthka Nassowva - Ruthka Joklova - had a cover, and I had a cover, so in the evenings we made our bed - a cover without any mattresses on the wood; with the second cover we both covered ourselves up, and with our very thin coat we put on the cover and on we went with our bodies, one to the other, because it was winter. It was January and February and March in Auschwitz, and it was not heated. It was awfully cold. Without stockings, without underwear, in these very thin clothes. Without food.

C.L. And where was your husband?

E. In the 'Familienlager' it was like this: on one side were women and on the other side were men. We saw each other, we talked together. In the evening it was allowed for one hour - the bell rang, and for one hour it was allowed (or half an hour, I'm not sure) to meet your husband on the Lagerstrasse - your husband, or father - then the bell rang and you had to separate. Other meeting places: as I told you before, by the W.C. or the washing room. These were the meeting places.

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RUTH ELIAS 13

E. One day there were rumours that - we had no newspapers or radio and we didn't know what was going on outside; the whole time we were in camps, from Theresien until the end, we just missed the whole history. Even today it is lacking in my knowledge. We had no news. But there were rumours all the time. Sometimes you believed the rumours and sometimes you didn't, but there were rumours that the Allies were bombing Germany and that there were transports leaving Auschwitz with young people for work - that they needed hands for work to rebuild what the Allies had done. We didn't think whether it was true or not, but one day we were told 'Selection'. Mengele arrived. The rumours went that they would take out of Auschwitz young and strong people. I thought 'Young I am, and strong I am, but I am pregnant. How can I get out of Auschwitz?' I had a friend of mine in the Schreibstube, and I told him 'Look here, I can't go to the selection. Something tells me I can't go to the selection, but I want my name on the list to leave Auschwitz. Is it possible?' He told me 'It is possible'. When the selection was, when Mengele arrived...

C.L. It was a selection in the Czech family camp?

E. In the Czech family camp. When the selection was, when the

SS arrived I went up to my cot and put myself underneath the cover, very flat, hoping that they would not find me. They ordered everybody out of the barracks and everybody had to be there. They controlled numbers and so on, and they started the selection. There was perhaps a confusion, I don't know what it was, but my name was put on the list and when the SS arrived in our block and started to search the cots I thought they would hear my heart hammering. But they didn't find me. That was my big luck that they didn't climb up the cots. My name was put on the list, and the very next day I, with other young, healthy people, left the Familienlager.

C.L. You didn't see Mengele this time?

E. No. I left the Familienlager, and in the Familienlager were left sick people, elderly people and all the children and some young mothers with the children.

C.L. And they were gassed some time later.

E. Later on they were all gassed. I remember one case, Braunova, I don't remember her surname, she got hold of some sleeping pills and gave them to her small child. She smuggled her child to the women's camp where we came. There the child woke up and started to cry, and she had to go back and she was gassed. It was a terrible tragedy. A beautiful blond child. We were in the women's Lager, and again one day we were told we were going to work, to Germany. Nobody believed it.

C.L. From the Czech family camp...

E. We were transported from the Czech family camp, first to the

women's camp - the 'Frauenlager' - of Auschwitz; in the meantime the men from the Familienlager were separated and sent away. We women were transferred to the Frauenlager. One day - we were there one or two days, I don't remember - we were told 'Selection'. We were going to Germany. Nobody believed we were going to Germany. We didn't believe it. But we had to get up - 'Aufstellen zu fünf!' - and we had to get rid of our clothes. Mengele was there, and some other SS people, and I saw from far away that women all naked were going between 2 SS, and there Mengele was standing making 'Right! Left!', waving with his hand. I didn't know this; either life, or death. Life, death. It's very easy.

C.L. How was he? How was Mengele?

E. How?

C.L. Yes. How did he look?

E. I will tell you a little later, ok?

Again my instinct told me, 'If I go in between these 2 SS, I will not live', because I was in the 8th month of pregnancy with a big belly.

C.L. 8 months!

E. 8 months. I asked some beautiful friends of mine, young girls, 'Please stand in front of me and behind me. Perhaps the man which is in Mengele will not see me, will overlook me, so I can come with you on the right side. I don't know which is the right side. And that's just what happened. Several beautiful girls were in front of me, and Mengele waved me to

the side with these beautiful girls. I came to them and started to cry, because something in me - I didn't know it, but something in me told me 'You have saved your life'. And I wanted to live, I was so young.

We were packed into the cattle wagons again, and we arrived again after the same journey - a terrible journey - in Hamburg.

C.L. That's very far.

E. Hamburg, Germany. We were on the Amerikakai, in big warehouses. There were cots - 3 stories of cots. We were put into these warehouses, and the very next morning we got up, everyone got a shovel or something and we were told we had to clean a bombed refinery, there in Hamburg. Off I went with my tummy, and we started to clean the bombed refinery. We were crawling about the ruins and so on. We were told what we had to do, we returned in the evening dead tired, but somehow *satisfied* ... (?) I was with my friends, with my Haverin(?) I asked our block elderly (orderly?) in the morning - or in the evening, I'm not sure - 'Don't say, if somebody asks you, that I am pregnant. I am going to work. We will see what will happen'.

C.L. It was a woman?

E. A woman, yes. A Czech.

The next day I went to work, and happily I came home. I think I was for 3 or 4 days going out to work, coming back, *living* with my friends, not thinking what the future would be.

(Cassette n° 2)

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RUTH ELIAS 14

E. We went to work. Every day we came back tired because there were real ruins to clear up.

C.L. Was it an oil refinery or a sugar works?

E. An oil refinery. It was somewhere in the harbour of Hamburg. We were taken there by lorries and brought back in the evening. It was very hard work, and I don't know how many days I went to work and came dead tired back. Somehow I was happy with my friends, until one morning an SS doctor came in and asked 'Are there sick people here on this block?' My block elderly, who was very friendly with me and I was very friendly with her, said 'No sick people, but 2 pregnant women'. I was so astonished and didn't know what to do at this moment because I didn't want them to know I was pregnant. I went to work - I didn't want it. And until this time I didn't know there were two of us. Immediately the SS doctor said 'You are not going to work', and he took us - Berta and me - to the SS Kommandetur in Hamburg, and said he had found 2 pregnant women who couldn't go on with this hard work, and that we had to go away from Hamburg because all the women there had to work. We were unable to work. Berta was also in her 8th month of pregnancy, and her

story of how she came to Hamburg was similar to mine.

This SS doctor gave us over to another SS who had his rifle, and on his rifle he had a bayonet. We were led to the railway station, and on the railway we heard him taking tickets to Ravensbrück.

C.L. He took tickets?

E. Yes. to Ravensbrück. We went in a train from Hamburg to Ravensbrück. We were given into a camp - it was only a women's camp at Ravensbrück; and we were on the 'Krankenrevier'.

C.L. How did you make the trip to Ravensbrück?

E. By train.

C.L. A passenger train?

E. A passenger train, and with us the SS with their bayonets. We had clothes, a dress which had a cross from another material sewn across in front and in the back; underneath the cross was cut out so you couldn't take off the cross and be in a normal dress. That was the sign of a prisoner. We went through Berlin, and at the railway station in Berlin - we were talking Czech with Berta - and we saw 'Rollstiegen', rolling steps, and thought 'We will escape now'. On we went to the rolling steps, but we forgot we had this prisoner's sign and the SS started to shout. People upstairs were already waiting for us, and holding us, - and we had thought we could escape in big Berlin with our bellies!

So we arrived in Ravensbrück and we were on the 'Krankenrevier'.

One evening they said 'All pregnant women have to come to a

certain spot'. We arrived, and we saw several pregnant women, perhaps 20, standing there. It was again my terrible instinct - I don't know how to tell it. I told Berta 'I will say we are sisters and you have got pains, and I will stay with you'. It was very simple for me. We were standing in the heap of pregnant women, and an SS came and told us we were going away with the transport. So I said 'I want to talk to the 'Lagerälteste', to an SS woman.' He said 'Ok, come with me', and he brought me to the Lagerälteste. When I think today, Where did I get these thoughts? Where did I get the courage to think of things like that? I don't know. It was again this instinct. I came to the Lagerälteste and told her 'We have just been told we are leaving tonight, but my sister is pregnant too and she has pains. You as a woman, perhaps you understand, I can't leave my sister in this state here. She has got pains.' She gave the order that I was to stay with my sister on the Krankenrevier, because my sister has got pains. She didn't ask if it was true that she was a sister.

We stayed overnight, and the pregnant women went and never appeared again. They went to the gas chambers. The very next morning...

C.L. Where, in Ravensbrück?

E. Yes.

C.L. Were there gas chambers in Ravensbrück?

E. No, no. They went away by transport to Auschwitz. We heard afterwards that they arrived in Auschwitz. But we stayed

overnight, and in the evening the others went. In the morning the SS doctor saw that it was not true, that my 'sister' had no pains. We had to disappear from Ravensbrück, I don't know why. So the SS Lagerführer gave us an SS man, again with a rifle and bayonet, and a midwife. We had to leave Ravensbrück; we were brought in a car, the 'grüner Anton' in which prisoners were transported. We were both in a cell inside, and we thought 'We don't know where we are going, we are leaving Ravensbrück' - but we had no idea where we were going. Out we came from this 'grüner Anton' and we were on the railway station of Ravensbrück, and we heard when the SS took 4 tickets and said "Nach Auschwitz". All our world, Berta's world and mine, collapsed, because we knew we had escaped from Auschwitz and now we were going back. To death. Because we already knew what Auschwitz was. No chance. We had to go. We were sitting in the train going to Auschwitz, and nearing Auschwitz. You must know we had signs - a red triangle, and over it a yellow one. The yellow meant 'Jew'. With Berta we decided to take off the 'Jew' triangle because only the red triangle meant 'political'. And we were Political Jews. So we took off the yellow triangle, the only thing we could do, and we arrived the next day at dinner time. (It was exactly dinnertime) in Auschwitz, with the SS and the midwife. The SS took us to an office, where only one German SS officer was sitting - I don't know if it was an officer, I think it was a German soldier. He said 'Heil Hitler! I am bringing 2 pregnant women who do

not belong to Ravensbrück; because of their numbers they belong here, so I brought them back to Auschwitz. Heil Hitler!' He turned around and off he went. I said to Berta in Czech, 'He has no papers! Nothing he had from us'. Already this German soldier called to me 'Your name?' I gave a Czech name - I said ^{my name} 'Maria Svoborna'.

Bobine 75

RUTH ELIAS 15

E. ... so he asked my name, and I gave a Czech name, Maria Svoborna. He asked the name of my father and I said a Czech name, something 'Svoborny'. He asked me, 'Father a Jew?' I said 'No'. 'Mother a Jew?' 'No'. 'You are not a Jew?' I said 'No!'

He called my friend and she did the same, she just gave a false name, because we had no names; we were cattle, nothing but cattle. No names at all.

C.L. Was there no chance they would find out through the numbers?

E. There was of course a chance, but I just took the chance because I saw in the face of this soldier, he was a very simple man without any power. I told you we arrived at dinnertime, and there was nobody there, only him. I think the other ones were just eating. So we took the chance. It was nothing. He called for an Ordonnant, a man who had to accompany us, and he said 'Frauenlager'. The moment he said 'Frauenlager' - we were talking Czech together with Berta - so I told her 'We will

live, Berta. We are not going to the death, we are going to the Frauenlager'. Every time there was hope, and the will to live was so very strong. We were only thinking of how to live, how to come over all this.

We came to the Frauenlager and we were a very big sensation, because we were the first people who arrived back from a transport who ever left Auschwitz. As we didn't believe that the transports leaving Auschwitz had this destination, so nobody in Auschwitz believed it. We were the first living witnesses who came back, and we told them 'Yes, we were in Hamburg, and we were working in Hamburg; we just came back.' It spread over the Frauenlager. We were such a sensation that Mengele heard about the sensation, and in he came to see us. He called us, and started to shout: 'How is it possible that I didn't see 2 pregnant women? Where were you when I...' (he didn't use the word Selection - 'ausgesucht')... 'when I was picking out people for work?'

C.L. How did he say it in German?

E. 'Als ich die Leute für die Arbeit ausgesucht habe'...

He just couldn't grasp it that he didn't see us, and he said 'Ok, you will give birth...' 'Entbinden Sie, und dann werden Sie weiter sehen' - 'Give birth, and then you will see'.

He came each day, a very charming man. He talked several words with us about - I don't know what - 'How are you feeling, What are you doing?' and so on.

C.L. How was he? I heard that he was a handsome man.

E. He was attractive, very attractive, very charming, very good

manners.

C.L. He was tall? or small?

E. He was middle-sized, not tall and not small. He made a very good impression in his uniform, and he was very self-conscious, (= self-confident?) and very secure.

C.L. Was he young?

E. Yes. And of course we heard Mengele and we were afraid, very afraid of him. My tongue was somehow stiff, and I only answered his questions. He came every day to visit us; we were in the 'Krankenrevier' of the Frauenlager. One day in the afternoon I started with my pains. I didn't know they were pains, I thought I had eaten something, because I had nobody to explain to me. The pains in the afternoon became stronger and stronger and stronger. In this Krankenrevier was a Polish midwife, and she saw me; she took a cover and put it... in the blocks there was an oven running from one side to the other, and in the middle was a sort of bench you could sit on, a very long bench through the whole block. She put a cover on it, told me to lie down, and she started to pray the rosenkrantz near me. The pains went stronger and stronger, and I gave birth that night to a beautiful girl. Very big. She helped me. There was no cotton wool, there was no boiling water, nothing. I lay in my own dirt. The baby was born, and from somewhere she took some linen, I don't know where she got it, and put the baby into the cot near me. In the morning Mengele came and told this woman, 'You have to put a bandage over her breasts - she mustn't feed the baby. I want to see how long a baby can live

without food'. My breasts were bound, and the baby was near me, crying. She was hungry. I got soup, and took off a piece of the linen and took a piece of bread, put it in the soup and into the mouth of my child, because the child was hungry. This went on for several days. I had a high temperature running because I was swollen with milk and I couldn't breast-feed my baby. Every day Mengele came to see and make his research, how long a baby can live without food. As I said, there was no cotton wool. It was terrible, how we were lying in our own dirt, most of us. The baby started to be skinny and more skinny, and got oedemas, it was a terrible sight. The next day, when Mengele came he told us 'Tomorrow morning at 8 o'clock you will be ready with your child. I am coming to fetch you'. I knew where he was going to fetch me - he was taking us to the gas chambers, and I didn't want to live any more. It was terrible, I couldn't bear it any more. Somehow I was glad that I was escaping this misery. In the evening, when the lights went off and it started to be night, I knew it would be my last night. My child couldn't cry any more. It was terrible. I can hear the voice - the noise, it was not even a voice - and I started to cry because I knew tomorrow I was going to die with my child.

The lights went off and I started to scream, because everything was so terrible. A doctor, a woman doctor, came to me: "Why are you screaming?" I told her "I am going to die tomorrow." She said "Oh, it's you who returned from Hamburg?" I said "Yes, I am going tomorrow. Mengele is coming to fetch me."

She said "I must do something for you". She came back half an hour later with an injection needle. She told me "Give this to your child." I thought "What is it?"

Bobine 76

RUTH ELIAS 16

E. She told me "Give this to your child." I asked her "What is it?" and she told me "Morphine". I told her, "How can I give this to my child? How can I be the murderer of my child?" She told me "I have taken the Hippocratic oath, and I must save lives. You are young, and I must save your life. The child can't live; look at the child, how it looks. But you are young and I must save you. You will give this to your child because I can't". I didn't want to, and she started to talk to me, into me. The more she talked, the less I had any 'Widerstand'...

C.L. Resistance.

E. ...until I made it. I gave the injection to my child. She took the injection needle away and the child started to die, near me. It took perhaps one hour, perhaps two. I don't know. In the morning, when day started, in the Krankenrevier they always collected corpses. Every morning there was a heap of corpses in Auschwitz, and they came and collected my child too. They took it away from me. At 8 o'clock Mengele came and I was ready to be transported. He asked me, "Where is the child?" I told him "It died last night." "I want to see the corpse."

Off he went. I was told that he was looking for the corpse, but in this heap of corpses, to find such a tiny corpse - he couldn't. Even for Dr Mengele it was difficult. He came back to me and told me in German: "Haben Sie ein Schwein gehabt! Mit dem nächsten Transport gehen Sie weg!" This is a German expression - "You had luck! With the next transport you are going away".

I was not glad. I had no joy. I was broken; I didn't want to live, I wanted to live - I didn't know what I wanted. I was apathetic, nothing was for me - no joy at all. With the next transport I went away. We were transported to Taucha, near Leipzig and we had to work in the Hassachwerke, where they were producing the Panzerfaust. Again, I don't know how it came, I had luck; I was in a transport with plenty of Hungarian girls, and the very first evening, when we arrived, the SS came and asked "Is there somebody who talks German?". Instinctively my hand went up, and the German told me "You will pick out 5 other girls. You are going away with the car." After Auschwitz, to go away with the car meant to go to the gas. I said "On my conscience I can't take 5 other girls; pick them out." He picked out 5 strong girls, and off we went with the car. We came to a bakery, and we were asked to load the car full with bread for the camp. We started to load bread, and in the end the baker's women gave us a whole loaf of bread. When you get a million pounds, I think I couldn't have been so happy^{as} with this loaf of bread. I forgot to tell you that in Taucha bei

Leipzig we got these striped uniforms, and also a coat made out of it. I took the coat, and behind the loaf of bread; I took it home so the SS didn't see it. So I went and took another loaf up to 4 or 5 loaves of bread I started to steal for my room-mates. We had bread! And I was lucky to be in a transport group. We were loading coal for the camp and ammunition for the SS, but mostly we were loading, we six girls, food. That means we were eating in the car - carrots, which we had to bring or onions, which we had to bring, or bread. If you have food you are strong and you survive, and I don't know how I came to it but again it was food, and I survived.

In this camp we were women, and nearby was a men's camp. The men had to pass the women's camp from work.

(Excuse me, I must go back to the bakery): the baker's wife was very nice, and every time the ^{SS} went with us and accompanied us, he said "Please don't escape from me, I am responsible for you." I said "Be sure, we have nowhere to go. We will not escape from you." We were very good prisoners because it was impossible to escape anywhere. So he started to flirt with her; I made an 'error': instead of taking twice five loafs, I once took six times two loafs. She was standing, and every time we passed, she ^{made the} ~~tense~~ - she was signing. Once I took 12 breads, and once I took 10, and again 12 - I started to steal from the bakery. I told my girls: "Five times ten breads, and once, twelve breads." And in our camp, until the end of the war, nobody knew how it was that in our camp each prisoner got, until the end, one-third of a loaf of bread and it was plenty.

We were stealing bread, and we had bread; even when we got our whole loaf in the evening, we were standing on the pathway where the men had to pass, and we were throwing them bread because the men needed bread too, not only the women. So we had bread, and only by stealing. I was an expert in stealing. I must laugh when I talk about it.

We had a doctor in this camp, who was the doctor also for the men as well as for the women. Because he was the connection - he was a Czech - I told him "Alex"(and I don't know his family name, I just called him Alex...) Whenever we brought ammunition we had to hide it away, and I thought somehow the men must know where the ammunition is. Every time I told Alex, "Alex, the ammunition is there and they are hiding it". Alex also got bread from us. One day they called us; we heard the Allies bombing around there, and also bombing the factory. (Now comes the nice part of the story).

Bobine 77

RUTH ELIAS 17

E. I was in connection with the doctor, because I knew he was the doctor of the men's camp as well as the women's camp. I wanted the men to know what was going on, I don't know why. The bombing by the Allies got stronger and stronger, and we knew through the nervousness of the SS that something was going on.

It was Silvester 43 - '44, excuse me - and I knew...
Yes, Silvester '44/'45, the beginning of '45 ... I knew that the SS was having a party and I told my girl roommates, "I will steal coal and we will have a party". I went and stole coal - we had an oven which served us sometimes when we had plenty of lice (so we put coal in the oven, which I stole, and we put our clothes on the hot stove, it was a big, round one, to burn off the lice. But they came back again, plenty of them!) So I stole coal again, and I knew the SS would be very busy so we would have a party. We invited the roommates from another room, and we thought 'Ok, we are several nations here' so we started to sing, each nation their own songs, and it was very nice. But there were other Czech girls who sang Czech songs, so I thought 'Ok, so now I will sing a German song'. So I sang a song of Sara Leander. My back was to the entrance door, and I sang a song 'Ein neues Leben fängt an, ein neuer Tag kommt heran'. It says 'A new life starts, a new day comes' - a song full of hope. I didn't know why the girls in front of me made gestures, and I finished the song and heard behind me the Lagerführer, the SS, who was listening to my song. That was the gesture of my girls. He said "Oh, you know how to sing. Tomorrow you will come to the Rapportstube, and you will see." The next day my girls were pitying me, "What would the Lagerführer do with me?" He gave me an order: "In a fortnight you will make a complete variety programme, and it must be ready for a performance in a fortnight". I told him,

"Herr Lagerführer, never in my life have I done such a thing!"

"An order is an order."

I came back and told my girls, "Something must be done". We had luck, since in the same camp there were also gypsies, beautiful women, they were dancing and singing. That means the others were working with them in the factory. Off we went to the gypsies, and in a fortnight we had a wonderful programme. There was an old piano, and there was a block with a kind of stage. So we performed, and it was all right; one afternoon it was for the women, and one afternoon for the men. The SS were attending this performance. Why the performance? Because of the bombing, and they just wanted to take their thoughts away from it. When the bombing became bigger they asked for another performance. I said "Without men, I can't." The Lagerführer allowed men to be in this performance. I came to the hall there and saw 2 men on the stage, so I asked "Who are these men?" "One of them knows how to sing," and I asked what his name was. "His name is Kurt Elias". He is my husband today; that's how I met my husband, on the stage. He doesn't know how to sing, he sings very false! He doesn't know until today! So we made a second performance, but all was very nervous because we felt the end coming. One day they asked us for an Appel, and we got the order that 50 sick people were staying in the camp and they needed 50 healthy people to attend them, and the other people were leaving the camp. "Who wants on his own will, freely, to stay in the camp?" I said I would stay in the camp with the

sick people. The whole camp was emptied, and all the elderly German watchmen took over the watch over us. We were attending the sick people for 4 or 5 days, and we watched the German watchmen. One day they were not there. We thought "Can it be possible that we are free? It's impossible!" Without any drama, without anything. The doctor and I went to the gate of the camp, and we opened the gate and stepped out alone, on the street, and we couldn't grasp it that we were free. We went down the street on the way to the town. I knew the surroundings because I went with the car, and after a while we heard terrible sounds from a ditch - 'Stöhnen', I don't know how you would call it - and we came to the ditch. There were 2 people in the ditch with terrible burns - 2 men. We took them up and asked what happened. Very shortly, in Polish - we understood Polish - they told us that they were in a camp nearby and when the German watchmen disappeared SS came, put covers on the windows with gasoline all around the block. They were with rifles and set fire to the covers, and shot whoever tried to escape. These two men somehow escaped and came to warn us. We immediately took them, ran back with the doctor and gave the alarm. Each one of us took an ill person, and we said "Only out of the camp. Outside nothing terrible can happen". And we started to leave the camp, running as we could with the sick people, and in front of us came a German with a bike. He passed me, and said "Come after me, I will show you to the Americans". As we went, I believed him - we went after him, and we were in the fields. It started to be dark...

Bobine 78

RUTH ELIAS 17 (deuxième caméra)

E. I was in connection with the doctor,...etc. (voir RUTH ELIAS 17)
jusqu'à: 'terrible sounds from a ditch - 'Stönnen, I don't
know how you would call it...' (à la page 53).

Bobine 79

RUTH ELIAS 18

E. ...(?)...I came to Czechoslovakia, and I started to look, I
started to go wherever we decided to meet after the war. Not
a single soul. I started to be desperate, and I started to
look. Not a single soul. I started to be alone, alone, alone,
I went into a depression and had to be transported to a
sanatorium. I didn't want to live. This broke me.

C.L. Everybody had died?

E. Everybody. Nobody from my father's thirteen sisters and
brothers, with their children and their wife. Only one aunt
who lived in Palestine survived. The whole family went, and I
was alone.

C.L. Your sister too?

E. Nobody. And I went into a depression and was transported to

a sanatorium because I didn't want to live. The doctors didn't know what to do, so one doctor - he was very clever. The sanatorium was in a castle, and he told me one day when I came, and a very thick rope was lying on the table...I told him I didn't want to live, and he told me "You know, I quite understand you. Outside there are big trees. Take this rope now, and go and hang yourself. That's one possibility. The other possibility is to start to make lines through(?) what was, and start to live. And every time when something happens to you, make a big line." And it was like this, and I started to make lines; I have made plenty of lines since in my life. And I started to get hope. I know one person, she is my mother today and she lives in Israel, she's the doctor who saved my life. Never will I forget Matza Blaiiah(?) who saved my life. She is today a lady of nearly eighty, and a doctor.

C.L. The one who gave you the injection for the child? She is alive?

E. From Israel I went to Czechoslovakia in '65, and I found her.

When I came to her and stood in the door, I thought she would have a heart attack. We were so very excited, both of us.

C.L. She is Jewish?

E. She is Jewish. Matza Blaiiah, Dr Matza Blaiiah(?).

C.L. Where is she now?

E. She is living in Israel.

C.L. Ah, she came.

E. She is living in Israel. She escaped in 1968 from Czechoslovakia and she is my mother today. We are so very, very close.

I only want to tell you one, very short story: I gave birth here in Israel to two boys, but when I was in hospital and my first boy came out of my body a nurse came and took the child away. The moment I saw she was taking the child away, I started to scream "Don't take my child away, you will kill my child! Don't take my child away!" I started to cry, and the doctors and nurses were looking at me. Nobody knew, and nobody cared about people from concentration camps, what they went through. They thought I had gone mad. Afterwards one doctor came and struck me, so I told him "Give me my child! Don't take my child away!" He ordered my child to be brought to me. I was the only mother whose child was lying near her, because I told him the story. I could never talk about it in the beginning, people didn't understand us and we closed ourselves up because nobody could understand. Plenty of people committed suicide because there were no doctors and nobody could understand them.

In '49 I came to Israel, and I am very happy here. It's the only country I can and will live in. Whenever I go abroad it is very nice to go sightseeing, it is very nice to be a tourist - even a guest. Somewhere, some houses all over the world, I can be, but Israel is my home. When I came down the steps from the ship, my head went up. And I am a proud Israeli who loves her country. I can't live anywhere (else).

One more thing I will tell you.

C.L. Do you feel secure here?

E. Only in Israel. Nowhere else. I am among my people, and I have my country. I know I am fighting for it because I know it is my country. My children are fighting for it. I never had a homeland, nobody wanted us, nobody gave us any help. Why was the whole Holocaust? Why did 6 million have to give their lives? Because no country in the whole world gave us a hand to help. And here is my country, because here I am in my homeland, my 'Heimat'.

I tell you, because nobody gave us a helping hand, therefore 6 million had to go. It was very easy in the UN to raise the hand, to vote for Israel. Had they helped us, another 6 million would be here(?). But we have now our home, our Israel, and for this I will fight, we will fight, and my children will fight, because we need to have a land where we can live as Jews and nobody tells us 'Bloody Jew'.

It is a story. I can tell you plenty of it, something more.

Did you ask me something more?

C.L. Don't talk now. Stay like this.

(RUTH ELIAS 18. Clap de fin)

(fin de l'interview)