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## Oral history interview with Ilse Diamant

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### Transcript

**Ilse:** I'm Ilse Diamant, I was born in Germany. My birthday is October 2nd 1928.

**Int. 1:** Where were you born, Ilse?

**Il.:** [louder] I was born in Germany, in Christfelde,<sup>1</sup> it's a little village. We lived there my parents, my sisters, brother, and my grandmother. We were five children, and the grandmother lived in that, eh village, in that house. We had two houses, one where we lived, and one was a *gastwirtschaft*. It's like a little hotel, a liquor store, and little apartment...

**Int. 1:** Supermarket.

**Il.:** Supermarket. In 1937 my Jewish children [scoff], we were the only Jewish family in that village. In 1937 Jewish children couldn't attend to the Christian school, so my parents had to send my sister, and me and my brother and I to a bigger, big city Stettin where they had the Jewish school.

**Int. 1:** Where did you live in Stettin<sup>2</sup>?

**Il.:** Oh, my parents had paid a family to take care of myself and my sister and my brother went to an orphan home. And one of my sisters left to Israel in 1937, and the other, she went to the last *Jungalia*<sup>3</sup> to Israel. It was in December 1939 to Triest, in Italy [pronounced together with the interviewer].

**Int. 1:** When did you first realized how bad things were getting? How dangerous it was going to be there?

**Il.:** When my father was arrested. My father was arrested in the *Kristallnacht*<sup>4</sup>, and the, how they start to burn the synagogues, breaking all the windows from Jewish people, and my

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<sup>1</sup> Now Chrystkowo in Poland.

<sup>2</sup> Now Szczecin, in Poland.

<sup>3</sup> I have not found the meaning of this term. It probably refers to a typical Jewish dance.

<sup>4</sup> *Kristallnacht* was a pogrom (ethnic or religious persecution) against Jews throughout Nazi Germany on 9–10 November 1938, carried out by SA paramilitary forces and German civilians. The German authorities looked on without intervening. The name *Kristallnacht* comes from the shards of broken glass that littered the streets after the windows of Jewish-owned stores, buildings, and synagogues were smashed.

father was arrested and other men, and he came to Buchenwald.<sup>5</sup> But then it was already too late, we couldn't move out to other country. My parents had the chance to go to Shanghai, with their mother, with her mother, sister and brother.

**Int. 1:** That would have been your aunt.

**Il.:** Yes, but my mother never wanted to separate the children, she wanted to go together, so they stayed back.

**Int. 1:** So that piece of the family survived, that went to Shanghai?

**Il.:** Yes.

**Int. 1:** Where are they now?

**Il.:** In Stockton.<sup>6</sup> My grandmother died, she was very old, and my aunt and uncle are still there.

Ok, now I want to tell you what happened to me in Stettin. On 13th of February 1940 I was doing my homework and suddenly a knock on the door, very hard, and they forced to open the door. The lady who took care of me said "Open the door!". I do open the door and five SS Nazi came in with guns and very rude to us, and they give us an order that we have to pack in thirty minutes everything, whatever we can take, and we have to go out. The lady asked "Where are we going?" and they said "I will tell you later." So then we, I didn't know, I was so nervous, I didn't know what to pack, I put only other sweaters on myself, a pair of pants and they took my canary bird given from my parents to my 10th birthday and for the album for my parents. And, not policeman...

**Int. 1:** *Gestapo*.<sup>7</sup>

**Il.:** The *Gestapo* asked me "Why are you taking this bird?", I said "I like him very much, I want to take him with me, wherever I go I take him, because it was my present." So he said "Ok, if you like him so much, I want to show you what I will do" [starts to cry].

**Int. 1:** It's all right, Ilse.

**Il.:** He took the bird out of the cage, he turned the head right in front of me, I was only eleven years old, and said "Like the bird died, you will die too" [cries more]...and it was, such impress to me, I didn't know what was going on, so he took, I had earring on my ears, he took it out for me, [5:00] and also the album, he just slammed it on the floor. I said "I have no

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<sup>5</sup> One of the first and the largest of the concentration camps on German soil.

<sup>6</sup> In California.

<sup>7</sup> The *Gestapo* (abbreviation of *Geheime Staatspolizei*, Secret State Police) was the official secret police of Nazi Germany and German-occupied Europe.

parents here, that's the only thing what I have," he said "You will see everybody where I take you."

Ok, I was very frightened, and I was crying a lot, because that what I really loved the most, my dad, my bird. He took it away already. So, outside we went downstairs, outside the house, apartment, we saw lot of trucks standing already lots of people over. And we had to go, they pushed us up "Fast, fast, fast!". So, I asked the people "Where are we going?", they said "We don't know," and then I cry, and I didn't know myself. So, they took us to the cattle railroad train station. We were standing until they loaded everybody. I saw from far away my brother running to me. So, he was screaming "Ilse! Ilse!", when I was screaming "Erwin!", who was my brother, and he wanted to run to me and I said, it was full of SS around us, and I begged him "Please, let me go to my brother!". So later he said "No!" and I saw from far away, not far, too far away, that one of the Nazis [crying] took the gun, not the front, from the back and [unclear] Erwin fell down full of blood...

**Int. 1:** Full of blood...[unclear].

**II.:** And that was the last time I saw my brother [crying]. And we were four children, four girls, and one brother, I was very, very close to my [unclear] please...

**Int. 1:** Ilse, from there you went over to the cattle trains, didn't you?

**II.:** [sighing] We came to a hall and they gave us large sacks full of sweet and salty stuff like salami, and, I don't remember, lots of stuff. They did it on purpose, because they didn't give us any water, they wanted us, when we are hungry, to eat, and when it's no water, you die.

Ok, and then we have to right down our name and where we were born, and so and so. So we went in the cattle, wagons, and we were there for three days and three nights, it was the coldest winter whatever could be in many, many years, so lots of babies died, because they didn't have anything to drink, and lots of older, younger and older people too. But later I became very hungry and I start to eat something but I was all by myself. The lady was next to me but she said "Come on, I have my own sorrows, you know, I cannot take care of you." So, I was disappointed again.

**Int. 2:** This was the lady that you've stayed with?

**II.:** Yes, then suddenly she was disappointed because my parents didn't pay her anymore. So, I have found my friends, and other people. And I start to eat, I was very, very thirsty, but I know because people said "Don't eat! You will be hungry, you will be thirsty, you will die." But I was very, very hungry, how can you stay three days without any food. Ok, after three

days we went through Poland, and then we stopped into Lublin<sup>8</sup>. They threw us out like animals from the cattle wagon. And the only thing that I saw, snow and from the water was...

**Int. 2:** Icicles?

**II.:** Ice things. And I didn't care about anything, I was just so thirsty. And lots of people I saw dead because they shoveled the dead people out. And I was taking some snow, if they would catch me, I would be shot right away because I saw other people eating and the snow became a water bed, blood bed, full of blood. So, then there was a Jewish soldier there from the Army, and they gave us hot water, and some bread to eat.

**Int. 1:** From the Polish Army?

**II.:** Yes, and then we were again in one large hall and they put us in three different kind of villages. I came to Bełżec<sup>9</sup> with 600 people, I think.

**Int. 1:** But from Stettin were there how many people?

**II.:** From Stettin, 1300 [10:00].

**Int. 1:** And how many survived?

**II.:** Seven. I'm under them. And it was [sad] because under the war we had least and they found out that from every city, from every country, how many survivors are. And the fact is that I never met anybody else.

Ok, I was selected to go to with 600 other people to Bełżec which is not far from Lublin. First, it was a private life, you know, we were under Jewish people, then it became a ghetto, and then became worse and worse. Then it was, like, I cannot say too many things because it's too much, but I want to tell, [it was important] for it really affected me very much.

We didn't have enough water, I think they did it on purpose. And we had to go outside to take water from the well, that is, you know what a well is. And it was my turn to take water, because to bring it in the barrack for the Jewish people. So I went outside and I saw lots of Germans standing around the well and it was laughing and I saw dead people but I couldn't understand what it happened so they said I should go right away "Los, los!"<sup>10</sup> in German. So I took the pail and the chain, it go down and I look where the pail is already next to the water, and I start to fill it up and wanted put it up and I think it was heavier or something, I don't know. Suddenly I became shaking so much that I couldn't take my hands off, and I don't know what happened. I woke up, it wasn't a dream, but it was true, and the people in the barrack where I was laying down "You are so lucky! They wanted to kill you" because the

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<sup>8</sup> I am not sure about the specific name of the place. It sounds like "Lublinpova" but it does not exist.

<sup>9</sup> Another extermination camp in Poland, close to the city of Lublin.

<sup>10</sup> In English, "Go!".

Nazis said “Los!” and it means they connected the well with vias to the barn and for that I was...

**Int. 1:** Electrically...

**II.:** Electric, and until today when I see or feel something close electric I’m shaking, I’m getting hysterical, I cannot touch anything. Nobody can understand it, it was very hard.

Ok, [smiling to the interviewer and whispering] can you stop now?

**Int. 1:** Ok, let’s see, there was a ghetto and you were, you went on to a larger selection, in the spring of ‘43.

**II.:** Ok, in the ghetto there was lots of selection and Germans, most of the times, they did it the 13ths of the month, that was their lucky number, and also my arm number was 13, but ok, the biggest selection was in...

**Int. 1:** Spring of ‘43..

**II.:** Yeah, springtime, I don’t remember, because we didn’t have calendars [sighing].

**Int. 1:** Was that about the first time that when you ran into Feiks?<sup>11</sup>

**II.:** To Feiks.<sup>12</sup>

**Int. 1:** You wanna say who he was?

**II.:** [sighing] It was springtime and suddenly we heard early in the morning, very early, it could be like 5 o’clock, motorcycles, Germans, they came with the motorcycles, and next to the motorcycle they had, I don’t know how you call it, where somebody can sit there too...

**Int. 1 and 2:** [simultaneously] Sidecar.

**II.:** Sidecar, yes. And noises, and shooting. We looked out and outside it was dark and right away the Ukrainers ran into the barracks ”Raus raus raus!<sup>13</sup> Fast, fast, fast!” and we had to go in the *Appellplatz*.<sup>14</sup> We saw all the ghetto around where lots of Ukrainers, in black, I don’t know what it was...*Volksdeutsche*, and Feiks *Sturmabführer* came in with a revolver. So he said, he came first and he had to stand into the *Appellplatz*, then we had barracks for sick people. He went there and shot everybody with his own gun...

**Int. 1:** Pistol.

**II.:** Pistol, in the head. And we all had to carry out later the bodies. It was the first time, not the first time that I saw brains and all kinds of that stuff, but we had to take it outside. Then

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<sup>11</sup> Pron. <feiks>.

<sup>12</sup> Pron. <faiks>. I found this person on a Polish portal on Second World War: Franz Feiks, nr. SS 315 385, date of birth 21/03/1913, SS-Obersturmführer, promotion on 20/04/1944: <<http://www.dws-xip.pl/reich/biografie/numery/numer315.html>> (8 May, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> In English, “Out!”

<sup>14</sup> Used to describe the location for the daily roll calls in concentration camps.

he took the men and they had to go [15:00] next to synagogue to take a very [unclear] mass grave. And we know what it [was going to] happen. Then there were outside lots of trucks with German soldiers and Ukrainians and then...he took the Feiks' order, the *Sturmbannführer* Feiks' order, for the mothers to give the children, to take away the children. He took the children [starts to cry], the babies...one by one, from their mothers' arms, in front of us....[crying more] he took the babies' bodies...I can't [shaking her head and crying] and smashed them against the wall at the [unclear]...

**Int. 1:** Right in front of their mothers...

**II.:** [crying] Now, I cry more than before because I am a mother myself.

**Int. 1:** Yeah.

**II.:** [crying] I was so traumatized, but we know we all would get killed. I was screaming, also praying, "Shemà Israel, God help us,"<sup>15</sup> but nobody helped us. Then, the *Sturmbannführer* and another guy came and selected young women and men [sighing] and we went up the trucks but we have to see everything before, I was lucky, they selected me to go on the truck.

**Int. 1:** Did you think you were going to be in that grave?

**II.:** [strongly] No! I didn't think because I saw people, then he ordered people to undress themselves so I said, I only want to tell you again, if I would be together with my family I would never never separate from them, like my mother did, she said she would never leave the children alone. They want to die together or to be alive together. And because I was by myself and the lady who took care of me didn't want to know about me.

So, we have all have to see, we were on the truck with soldiers with guns, and then we saw all the naked people, women, children and men, were standing around the mass graves, and he said again "Los! Achtung, fertig, los!"<sup>16</sup> the *Sturmbannführer* Feiks. In the hand he had Vodka, something to drink, and then he had a pistol, not machine gun, and he ordered lots of Ukrainians to come next to him with machine guns. So they were shooting like -zzzz- and he was so happy when he saw people didn't die and were still alive and then he gave order "Push them all in!"

Jewish men before they went on the trucks they have to bury all the bodies. And so many people were screaming "Tell the people what happened to us! Where is God? Why nobody helps us? And tell the people what happened forever you will be free!" [crying]. Then I have...do I show? [shows her tattooed identification number and the camera does a close up

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<sup>15</sup> *Shema Yisrael* are the first two words of a section of the Torah and the title of a prayer that serves as a centerpiece of the morning and evening Jewish prayer services.

<sup>16</sup> In English, "Ready, steady, go!"

on it]. I have the number that was given to me, at Auschwitz. Many people told me to remove the number, to be remember all the terrible days and nights. And I said “No, I can’t do it, because I still have the picture in front of me” [sighing].

**Int. 1:** So this is a very important part of your life.

**Il.:** Very important!

**Int. 1:** Remembering...

**Il.:** ...to remember, listening to screaming “We are not dead! Shoot us! Tell the people what happened to us!” And I have to tell, but who wanted to know? [crying] Who wanted to? Nobody! [unclear]. I know too many people who went into the grief, it was very, very painful, but we didn’t cry too much on the truck, we were like paralyzed, it couldn’t go out a tear. There was praying in Hebrew “Shemà Israel, adonai elohenu adonai ehad, Help us God, look what happened!” My parents were religious, my father never went to work without our praying, you know, putting all these things on [mimicking wrapping something around the arms].<sup>17</sup>

**Int. 1:** Good people...

**Il.:** We were good people, we helped poor people [crying] [20:00]. Why did it happen to us? Because, we didn’t go out from Germany, we didn’t know about it, then it was too late because we couldn’t go anymore... [sighing] Can I stop now? [putting her face in a tissue and crying]. I am sorry, I can’t...

At min. 20:32 there is a tape’s interruption. In the meantime, Ilse probably had the time to refresh herself. The tape then restarts again for one second and we can see Ilse having a cigarette. Right after, the tape interrupts and starts again at 20:33 min. in the middle of the conversation.

**Il.:** ...the story but most of the story because I owe it to those people...

**Int. 2:** That’s right.

**Il.:** Innocent, young, old, children, it could be a generation, smart like Einstein and other people. And they wanted to [unclear], to wipe out all the Jewish things. And also very religious people. I couldn’t understand why it has happened.

Ok, we came to...I don’t know how many trucks there were, we came to a camp, it was an *Arbeitslager* first, Budzyń, that was in the forest, it was the first time, Belżec was the first

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<sup>17</sup> Ilse here refers to the *tefillin*, a set of small black leather boxes containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses from the *Torah*. They are worn by observant adult Jews during weekday morning prayers.

time, it was not in the forest, it was next to the temple. Now we are in the forest. Later we came to *Kat-zet*.<sup>18</sup> I worked very hard like always, and I don't know anybody, because I didn't know, my friends were already away from me, from Bełżec, I had no girlfriends anymore.

**Int. 2:** Where did your friends go?

**II.:** From Bełżec? They were shot in the grave, I never saw them again. One child was still there. So, her name was Eva Mosbach. She's still alive, she's in New York now.

Ok, so in Budzyń, we were there for a year and a half, I think. We didn't have a calendar. I know, I only remember if it was summer or cold or winter or something. And one day, they did lots of selections again, we were standing in *Appellplatz*, they were counting, [unclear] they took it out and killed, or somebody was tall, or somebody was shy, like they want, like their mood. And one day...it was like...fall, I think. We were standing on the *Appellplatz* and the *Lager Sturmbannführer* came to us and [unclear] and said "Are there Jewish children?", German, not Jewish, "Are there German children?". So I raised my hand, he said I should come ahead, so I thought I would get shot. But he said "You stay with me." Then he took the other people and went with them to mass graves and shots them. He told me and three other people to go out from the camps outside, and I had to clean up his apartment, where he and the SS were living. Then I got food, and I get a white dress, not a dress, like a uniform [simultaneously with first and second interviewers] and I was outside the camp because he said Jewish people in the camp they are dirty and I should be clean. So, after a while we went to...Majdanek.

**Int. 1:** But there were three other German people with you, Jewish people...

**II.:** Oh yeah, three other families, they lived also outside the camp, and we all were together, and one girl, she's still around, she lives in [unclear] is her name, she lives in Long Beach, and she was teaching me and giving us hope "One day we'll come out, and we will be free and at least you will be forget about the bad things, and you will be a smart young lady." So she was teaching us, sometimes we thought "We will not come out," but I had such a heavy feelings because the screaming in Bełżec give me hope, not only hope, strength "I have to tell the people, because those people couldn't tell, cannot talk anymore, and who knows if other people will be surviving and I have to tell the story." And this was carrying me on, from one...day after day [25:00].

**Int. 1:** From one camp to another.

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<sup>18</sup> Kat-zet, short for *Konzentrationslager*.

**II.:** From one camp to the other. I didn't know how many camps I will go.

Ok, then we all have to go inside the camp and it was the very, very last evacuation.

**Int. 1:** And this was Majdanek.

**II.:** And we have to walk to Lublin Majdanek. The professor Dr. Goodman was with me in the same march. He told me when...we went that march. And also, what's the name of Marz, March...

**II.:** A husband...

**Int. 1:** Toby March.

**II.:** Yeah, Toby March was on *Appellplatz* in Budzyń, and he heard it when the *Sturmbannführer* asked for German children, and he knows only me, he heard it too, but he went with us to the march.

Ok, we all went, first we went to Krasnik<sup>19</sup>, it's not far from there, lots of Nazis with trained dogs went with us and who wanted to run away got shot on the spot, it was impossible, we couldn't run away.

**Int. 1:** Is there when you saw the rape?

**II.:** No, that was in Majdanek.

And we came to Krasnik, and that was also camp, and from Krasnik they took us, not far away, it was a brick factory. I remember it was a large [unclear] and lots of people, Germans gave the order to go up and they got burned. Screaming, unbelievable. And it was my turn to go up the step and suddenly I heard, a German said, the Nazi said in the *Wehrmacht*,<sup>20</sup> the soldiers "Get down! Fast!", we heard already the cannons from the Russians all around, we have to run away. And we have to run and I lost my shoes and it was like end of summer, I remember because the fields, they got cut off the wheat, what's the name?

**Int. 2:** Hay? The grass? The hay?

**II.:** Grain. And it was so high, it was stuck in my feet, but we have to run. And we went until we came over the river called Weichsel.<sup>21</sup> And then, on the way there I couldn't make it anymore, I was so weak and two men, I don't remember who it was, young men, felt sorry for me and lift me up because when somebody was weak or fell down, got shot right away and this [unclear] we were harmed so heavily. They lift me up and they said "Come on, you will make it!" and I said "I don't know" and then they spoke in Polish but I learned a little bit

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<sup>19</sup> Town in eastern Poland. It was the site of the Budzyń labor and concentration camp (now suburb of Kraśnik, *dzielnica*, pl.), where the prisoners worked for the Heinkel *Flugzeugwerke* factory, on aircraft production. This camp, with around 3,000 Jews, became a subcamp of Majdanek.

<sup>20</sup> The unified armed forces of Nazi Germany from 1935 to 1946.

<sup>21</sup> Vistula river.

of Polish in the camps. I couldn't write but I learned a little bit and I said "Can you talk German?". So he talked Jewish with me and he carried me. He saw that one of the Wehrmacht Nazis saw that I was carried, he put me down fast so he gave me a push "Come on!" and hold my hands, so we walked. And then we got some food and water and then they put us again to the, cattle railroad station, and they pushed us very fast, they opened the doors and they pushed us inside. Nobody knows where we're going. Suddenly we heard somebody "Auschwitz!" and they said "It's a *Vernichtungslager*."<sup>22</sup>

Ok, we came to Auschwitz and we marched there inside. And again, they select me to the death, Dr. Mengele.<sup>23</sup> And *ja*, I find my girlfriend, and she was standing in line with me, with her sister and her sister was supposed to go to the gas chamber. I knew it is a gas chamber because I knew them from Lublin Majdanek. The heavy doors with a seal, I know them exactly. I knew what it is. [30:00] And she said her name was Hilde Drucker and her sister was Ilse Drucker. We were very close to each other. And they said Ilse, the little one, has to go in. So the sister said "No, I am going in too." So I said "Hilde, please stay with me," not please, in German "Stay with me," she said "No I cannot, I have to stay, to go with my sister, she's the only one that I have left."

So, you know, before you go to die, you don't feel anything. I know I was so light, I had...like a bird, and think about nothing. And on that time, lots of transports came from Hungarian and it was such a mix up by the crematorium because they didn't have time, they came too many, to put them in and out [unclear] and the people were still alive. So, I thought myself "What should I do?" but it came so suddenly [higher tone of voice] like somebody told me to do something. I felt so light, not my body. And I took the dead people over my body because they were naked and I was naked. And afterwards they took the dead people away but it was not far there were standing other people for getting the number and shaving their hair. First, shaving hair and then getting the number and information of who you are. So, girls run to me when they saw that I was moving, I was still alive, and pushed me right away to them but I saw the bodies...unbelievable [unclear, starts to cry].

**Int. 1:** So you've been hidden under those bodies, Ilse...

**II.:** [crying louder] I was like paralyzed, I didn't know...I saw the body faces, open eyes looked at me, but they were already dead...[unclear].

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<sup>22</sup> In English, extermination camp.

<sup>23</sup> Josef Mengele (1911-1979) was a German officer and physician in Auschwitz. He was member of the team of doctors responsible for the selection of victims to be killed in the gas chambers and for performing deadly human experiments on prisoners.

**Int. 1:** The girls that pulled you away over there where they were, did you know them?

**II.:** [crying] No, I don't know, I don't know anybody. My girlfriend went too.

**Int. 1:** But they knew to save you.

**II.:** They save me, I don't know how, they pushed me away. I was [crawling] I remember. And they took my head and [unclear, mimics the act of dragging] [dragged] me to the place [crying more]. Again, a miracle happened [voice broken by crying].

**Int. 1:** You are saying a miracle happened? [32:38].

**II.:** Like a miracle, I don't know, I was already. I don't know, I didn't want to die, because what I saw keeps me alive.

So, then they took information, who I am. We got our visit, we came to a room to shave all our hair and then in another room to give you the number here...do I have to show them [asking interviewer]?

**Int. 1:** You showed it already.

**II.:** Oh yes. And then they gave us a white blue striped dress, only one dress, by the underwear, no bra, nothing. And they gave some [unclear]<sup>24</sup>that we should not have our...you know...

**Int. 1:** Your periods.

**II.:** Yes. And some soup. And they selected us to work, to be working, but they treated us like animals, because just animals got tattoo numbers. They didn't call us by names, just numbers, animals.

**Int. 1:** What was the work that you did there?

**II.:** In Auschwitz? We came to barracks. They were selecting us like German people, Holland people, from Dutch, and all generations. And I worked with Holland people, there were five girls, we have to take from the crematorium, they had lots of toilets, I don't know how you say it in English.

**Int. 1:** Latrine.

**II.:** Latrine? Yes, we have to take, they had a wagon with a big...[mimicking a circular shape], you know when you put like gasoline, tank.

**Int.1 and 2:** [simultaneously] Tanks.

**II.:** Tanks, yeah. In [unclear] we have to carry it, full, very heavy work, and not good food, you know food was such a piece of bread, and a little bit [of] margarine, soup, in the morning we had coffee, not real coffee, water coffee, whatever it was. And we have to carry it out,

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<sup>24</sup> I do not understand here the exact word, it sounds "food."

very far, [35:00] outside the camp for the field, just to make us working hard, they didn't need that really.

Then, I worked in the crematorium, to open all the dresses, where the sleeves' seams [are], to find gold or money or notes, all kind of stuff. And then I was working with the *Graskommando*,<sup>25</sup> they had such pieces of grass, we have to take five pieces of grass, we went outside the camp, and to make a lawn. And I was working, cutting big racks with a hammer. There were lots of girls, and we were talking. Some people talk Polish, some Russian, some other languages, I couldn't understand them. But we were all in one boat, we were all together. So, most of them never have smiled, I didn't know what smile is. I think, never in my life in camps I was smiling. And also, they took people out, I was in the children *kommando* and...

**Int. 1:** [interrupting] How did you get to the orchestra?

**II.:** Oh, the orchestra.

Ok, it was the biggest evacuation, and there were still people left over, but it was, I remember, it was in October. And the *Lagerkommandant* Josef Kramer,<sup>26</sup> that was his name. He liked the orchestra. How I met the orchestra? I was in *Strafkommando* [unclear],<sup>27</sup> there were next to the gate where you go outside to the other camps, and I was taking, one potato fell down from the wagon. And instead to shoot me, they put me in *Strafkommando*, I was sitting standing with my knees down where the orchestra was playing and hold here [touching her palms] two bricks and here two bricks for three, four hours. And if I would move, I would be right away killed. But I was so strong, I don't know who gave me this strength, now I understand why I was strong, because my parents are not alive anymore [her voice breaks, crying], I believe my mother...somebody was watching, I believed it so strongly, but I did not know that.

Ok, then they were all singing German songs and I met them there. Then we were selecting and I saw on the right side all the girls from the orchestra were there, and on the left side where I was selected, I didn't see them. So I thought myself "Come on, they must be dead, 'cause I went to many camps, I'm sure that where I'm standing is dead" and I smuggled myself to those to the right, and nobody from the people wouldn't say "You don't belong

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<sup>25</sup> Literally, the grass commando. In the village of Rajsko, one of Auschwitz's sub-camps, two Kommandos, gardening and plant-growing, were working here: <<http://auschwitz.org/en/history/auschwitz-sub-camps/raisko/>> (8 May, 2018).

<sup>26</sup> Josef Kramer (1906-1945) was the Commandant of Auschwitz-Birkenau and of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp; dubbed "The Beast of Belsen" by camp inmates.

<sup>27</sup> In English, the punishment commando.

here.” Everybody was, when they find somebody to help out they took them in, they helped me. They gave me courage, like “Come on, come on!”, they pushed me, also to them.

So, we came to the other, Bergen-Belsen, Germany, also in the woods, called *Lüneburger Heide*.<sup>28</sup> The Germans did everything in the woods, because they were afraid in the cities or someplace else it would break out the pest or something, sickness, so they did it in the forests, I think so.

We came...

**Int. 2:** The questions.

**Int. 1:** The question was around the orchestra and how they took care of you, with the typhus.

**II.:** Oh *ja*. Ok, we came to Bergen-Belsen. First, we didn't have baths, it was tense, it was so cold, windy. And I was together with Germans and Holland and Danish, no not Danish...

**Int. 1:** Dutch.

**II.:** Dutch.

**Int. 1:** Including Anna Frank.

**II.:** *Ja*. And next to me, because I was the same age like Anna Frank, she was next to me. I didn't know who Anna Frank is. She just mentioned her name, Anna Frank, that I remember. She was a very quiet girl, she was crying all the time, and I told her not to cry, we will survive. We were never laughing, but I was not crying, I couldn't cry. I said “Don't cry, we will survive” and I told her the story about those people in Bełżec and we have to be strong to live up [40:00]. But I remember she told me that nobody from her family was alive. She was by herself. She told me she had a lover<sup>29</sup> once, all kind of stuff, and I didn't know what lover means, I didn't have that. I forgot to tell you about Majdanek...it doesn't matter, ok.

Ok, then they build, had some barracks, and we came in the barracks. I used to work there by the airplane, *fallschirme*,<sup>30</sup> you the ropes that we have to...when somebody comes down from the airplane...

**Int. 1:** Parachute.

**II.:** Parachute. And there was a lady, she was the lady next to me on the, it wasn't a bed, you know, where we were sleeping. And she said what is my name, and I told her. She said “You know what? I remember your father,” I said “How do you remember my father?”, she said “I had two children, twins, we went together, we send my children to Israel from Trieste, and

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<sup>28</sup> Literally, Lüneburg Heath, is a large area of heath, geest, and woodland in the northeastern part of the state of Lower Saxony in northern Germany.

<sup>29</sup> I am not sure about this word but it probably it refers to 16-year-old Peter van Pels, who joined the Frank family in their concealed house in 1942. After a while, Peter and Anna entered a romance.

<sup>30</sup> *Fallschirm*, Eng. *parachute*.

your father took your sister also to Israel, and I met him there, your father was praying,” not praying but, how do you call that? You know when the Rabbi is...

**Int. 2:** Blessing?

**II.:** “Blessing your sister, and they were crying, and I told him Why do you make her life so miserable?” So my father said to that lady “I think it’s the last time that she might heard that.” [crying] It was the last time. She said “You know what? You’re by yourself, I take care of you.”

**Int. 1:** [interrupting] What was her name?

**II.:** Emilie Zinger. She has two children, three children in Israel, you know the twins and her daughter. I met them in Israel.

And she became sick, she had typhus or something. Who you got sick in the barrack, went to [unclear] in the *Krankenbau*,<sup>31</sup> where all sick people are going to die. And I asked somebody our *Block*, somebody in charge of the bread if I can work there, because she’s dying I want to bring her some soup, maybe she will not die when I bring her soup. He said “Yes.” So I was working, helping with the soup, you know we had such big [mimicking a big pot], how do you say that?

**Int. 1:** Pail?

**II.:** Pails, yes. And soup and I cleaned up with my finger, with the whole arm the rest from that, because I was carrying that, I got a liter more, and I could cleaned up that and she got the heavy stuff that was underneath and I fed her that she should be alive. But one day she became very sick and they took [her] away from me. And I cried very, very much, because she was so close, the only person [crying], she really helped me, because she wanted to tell me again “Be strong, we will survive, I have children in Israel, you have sisters in Israel, you’ll survive” [crying] and they took her away from me. It was also pleasing because of her [unclear] she looks in my eyes to me “Take me!”, I said “I can’t help you.” I was laying on her body and I said “Take me instead of her!” and they said “No, we have to take her, not you” [crying].

**Int. 1:** Is that when you got the typhus also?

**II.:** No, later I get typhus. So, she went to a barrack, where all sick people laying down on straw, waiting for their death, because they didn’t get any medication. And I saw lots of bread and soup and margarine laying down next to them and nobody touched it. So, I thought myself “Look, I am so hungry maybe I can help somebody else too.” I took, because it was

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<sup>31</sup> In English, the infirmary.

no stealing, believe me, it was no stealing, they were unconscious, they were just waiting for their death. I took the bread, I came to the barrack, and every day I went there and help other people, they were very hungry. And then after a day and a half, I found out that she's dead [her voice breaks again]. She's dead, the lady's dead [crying more], I couldn't help it. I was so crying, I begged, I said "God help me, let me die, let me die, I don't want to live anymore." [45:00] But it got to my mind "No, you can't!" So, the girl from the orchestra, Hilde Grünbaum<sup>32</sup> (now Hilde Zimche, she lives in Israel, in a kibbutz, Netzer Sereni), she came to me and she said "Come on, what is your name?". She said "I saw everything that happened." Oh, by the way, they got a little bit better food, more food, because the Kramer, Josef Kramer, likes them and they got them more food. So she said "Don't cry, I am your big sister and I'll watch over you, and look here five, six children girls from the orchestra." And she introduced [me] to all those girls, what they were playing, and we will help you, you've come to us, and took me away where that lady was laying down and put me up next to they were sleeping.

So, after a while she really helped me, with talking and giving me mood, and then...I became very sick. I get typhus, and they protect me because sick people wouldn't live there. Every time that they were counting she put over her body over me or somebody else, because everything was ok because she was from the orchestra, they trusted them, she was some elite, she was some big, big people. And I couldn't eat also because I had typhus, I wanted to drink and when we heard lots of shooting outside and my friends said "Let's run away, I think we are surrounded, the British and other armies, let's run away." And Hilde said "No, we cannot leave Ilse alone. We stay together." And suddenly we heard shooting. The Germans started to shoot still Holland people and other people, they expected to still to [unclear]. And suddenly we heard one of the girls she was, her name is Sylvia, now they call her *Schulermitt Wagner*,<sup>33</sup> she had a black...[touching her arm].

**Int. 1:** Armband.

**II.:** Armband. And that means she is a [unclear]<sup>34</sup>, she could go running back and forth. She found out she said "Oh, we saw a tank, the Russians, the..."

**Int. 1:** British.

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<sup>32</sup> On the "Yad Vashem" website I found information about Hilde Grünbaum. Moreover, it is preserved a featured artifact: a cloth bag that Hilde made out of a pillowcase for holding the sheet music of the women's orchestra at Auschwitz: <<http://www.yadvashem.org/artifacts/featured/hilde-grunbaum.html>> (9 May, 2018)

<sup>33</sup> Unclear term.

<sup>34</sup> Maybe *loyfriend*. I couldn't find anything related to black armbands and this term.

**II.:** “The British are coming.” Ok, I looked from the window and I saw the British tank and they had the loudspeaker. And then I saw on one side the *Lagerkommandant* Josef Kramer, barefoot, on the other side I saw a soldier with a British uniform but the star of David [crying]. I used to wear the star of David in the ghetto but in yellow, you know, for being killed. I saw somebody could help us, I couldn’t believe it, the star of David...I was so excited [her voice breaks], I couldn’t believe it, a Jew, a soldier, we went from one place to the other like a herd of cattle, chasing us. They treated us like animals, worse, I have a dog and I treat him better than they did to me. And suddenly we got free and they talked to us, we should not drink the water, it is...

**Int. 1:** Poisoned.

**II.:** Poisoning. And also the bread. “We have everything. We have bread, we have medicaments.”

**Int. 1 and 2:** [simultaneously] Medications.

**II.:** Medication and everything. And they came right way and asked “Who is sick?” and right away Hilde said me and took me and give me all kinds of shots or whatever and they cleaned us up, and we had already hair, you know, they grow already. But they didn’t know, they gave a lot of people sweet stuff and they got diarrhea with blood and they died. I was lucky I couldn’t eat because I was sick, and I just wanted to drink. And I remember they gave me cans of pears. Oh, it was so delicious [smiling]. I was dreaming after the war to have just a piece of bread, but I get the pears, it was so juicy. And until today when I open a can of pears I remember how the British doctor gave me the first can of pears and I loved it [smiling, but her voice breaks at the same time].

**Int. 1:** How did you open those cans?

**II.:** [50:00] They opened it. They wanted me to write a book, but it was too painful. I started just to talk about my brother [crying] and I said “No, I can’t talk anymore.”

**Int. 2:** Ilse, I am wondering about something. When those girls, Hilde and her friends, hid you in the orchestra, how was it that you were able to disappear in that way? In other words, did they keep careful track of you?

**II.:** Not too much, because the orchestra was more like a little [unclear].

**Int. 2:** Right, but how was it that you disappear from your own bunk?

**II.:** Yes, they took me away. They put somebody else, I think. I don’t know, I don’t know, because the lady died too, she was next to me. Hilde didn’t want me to remember that lady. But it was also, you know, I found out how to get more bread and it is what happened to

Anna Frank. She came to *Krankenbau*, they didn't give her anything and she died. Otherwise she would be alive. There was a hunger [in that] camp, most of hunger people died.

**Int. 1:** You wanted to talk about Majdanek, and we have just a couple of minutes on this tape.

**II.:** I was working by the crematorium and I saw lots of shoes there. When we came to Majdanek, nobody was there again, everybody got killed already. And we were the last ones that we came from Majdanek, because the Russians, I saw, you know...Majdanek is not in Lublin. It's on the road after Lublin, when you come from Lublin it's on the right side, they have gardening there and vegetables, all kinds of stuff, and then far away there there is a camp there. And I worked in a gardening and in the crematorium. We saw all kinds of toys, to select everything. And then when we saw, they start to burn our...what is the name, papers. But I remember I used to work also in the *Wäscherei*,<sup>35</sup> you know where clothing is, and I signed, wrote down my name, Ilse Domke. And when my brother-in-law, Freddie's brother, he's a Rabbi, went once to visit Lublin Majdanek, I told him to look on the wall and he really found my signature [smiling].

They gave us wooden shoes and I lost the wooden shoes because we were running, we saw suddenly they were gassing still people, not Jewish people, there were lots of Russians invalid, with one leg or so, and they start to kill them. And we have to march from Majdanek to Lublin, the other way, but we saw the German army came also that way to Lublin because the Russians came already there and it was a fight, we saw from far away canyons...

**Int. 2:** Cannons.

**II.:** Cannons [smiling], and airplanes fight us, the Russians were up and the Germans down and they were fighting like this [moving her hands up and down], shooting like hell. And we had to run in the *Chaussée-Graben*,<sup>36</sup> I don't know how you call them, you know on the road you have a little road, we were running there. But all Nazi women and Nazi Germans with trained dogs nobody could run away, if somebody would run away, he would be shot. And I saw lots of people running away, but they got shot. We went soon to Lublin, the city. Lublin was burning, but we went all around Lublin, I remember there was Lublin and we have to walk this way [indicates the opposite way] until we came over the vehicle.

**Int. 1:** In some place you had seen an attack to some other girls...

**II.:** Oh yeah, that was in Majdanek, I forget everything. So many things to say, how can you tell when you are five years in those camps in half an hour your life?

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<sup>35</sup> In English, the laundry.

<sup>36</sup> Historical term used in German-speaking countries, used to describe ditches that were dug alongside the road.

**Int. 1:** You were in seven camps.

**II.:** Yeah, I was in seven camps, and not the easy camps. And always being dead.

And in Majdanek there were girls, [55:00] the men were separate and the girls were separate. And the girls next to me, they were beautiful girls and the German soldiers came and rape so many girls and after that they shot them, and they died. And I was lucky 'cause they didn't touch me, because I was not pretty, I was more childlike than the other ones. So, all miracles. I don't know if it's miracles or somebody else watched over me.

**Int. 2:** It sounds as if you came very, very close to death, several times and then just something shifted.

**II.:** I don't know, maybe those people who got killed saved me, I don't know if it was my parents.

**Int. 1:** We have about two more minutes on this tape, Ilse. Is there something you want to say?

**II.:** I want to read it. Uh, but then they will see it, no? [watching in camera].

**Int. 1:** If you want to read it, you have the right to do that [handing a paper to Ilse].

**II.:** Well, I want really to read it because I would mix up, therefore I wrote here [putting her glasses on]. Thank you.

[starting to read the words that she wrote] After the Liberation I was like a stone. I could not laugh in a long time. My emotions turn to great sadness, I cried a lot when I was remembering my beloved parents [crying], sisters, relatives, my best girlfriends. I left them all behind me. I was like a stone. They were not able to be free [coughing]. It took me a long time to be adjusted again for a normal life. I was not able to stay in a movie theater and whatever has to do with music or happiness...[removes her glasses and starts to talk, without reading] When I heard happiness, I start to cry. In the camps I couldn't cry, now I start to cry. Then I was standing all by myself, my friends said "Come on, let's go together," I said "No, I want to be alone." I went away from them. I was reading books, [unclear] books in Bergen-Belsen, after the war. And I was sitting and crying and then I thought myself "Come on" and Hilde came to me "Ilse, push up, go in the theater [taking a tissue], starts to cry, but stay inside and don't go out" and I did it.

**Int. 1:** We stop now on this tape and then we'll put on the next tape.

**II.:** Other tape?

**Int. 1:** Yeah, another piece of tape.

At min. 58:04 the previous tape stops and starts a new one. We can see Ilse with her glasses on, ready to read again.

**Il.:** Where was the last one?

**Int. 1:** About halfway down the page, I think you were.

**Il.:** [reading] Came out and oh.

**Int. 3** [male voice] You were talking that you couldn't laugh.

**Int. 2:** Oh, when Hilde asked you to sit in the theater, even if you wouldn't, couldn't participate, just stay there and not isolate yourself.

**Il.:** Oh yeah [removes her glasses and starts to talk without reading]. Again, I want to say. In the camps I was like a stone. Like paralyzed. I couldn't laugh, I couldn't cry, sometimes I cried, but most of times I am not. Now I cry because I had nobody from my family.

Ok [puts on her glasses and starts to read]. Now I am free and I have no more to be frightened for that [removes her glasses and talking]. Not to smell anymore the odor from burning people, to see days and nights red skies and screaming from the trains. The trains came to Auschwitz right away and I used to work next to the crematorium, I saw them and we begged them "Throw us something over, food, because we are going to death" and they wouldn't believe it.

And now I'm free. But I think [puts her glasses back on to read], guilt was not only the Germans, the whole world knew about it, but nobody cared about us. I could not understand how people can be so violent to other any human beings [starts to cry].

I faced that many times and I can say that my whole life was a miracle. I still don't understand exactly why I was chosen to be alive [turns the page and continues to read] [1:00:00].

Survival testimony is more important than anything than can be written about survivors, because, I went that through [removes her glasses again and talks very emotionally] people were writing books also, but who was reading it knows the feelings, like I did. What I went through...from Bergen-Belsen, because I was still a child they wanted to take me to Switzerland, to go to school. But I refused, I wanted to stay with the girls, from the *Kapelle*, from the orchestra, together. We wanted to go just to Israel but in Israel the British didn't let us in. One time we heard from the joint that was in Bergen-Belsen. Oh, before I want to...In Bergen-Belsen there were lots of lists, to see from the survivors, but I couldn't find anybody, also from my city Stettin. We were thirteen hundred, just seven were underlined.

In Bergen-Belsen we found out Josef Rosensaft,<sup>37</sup> I don't know if you know him. He was a big *Mahal*,<sup>38</sup> to help out people to go to other countries. And I wanted to go to Israel. I find out also that I have two sisters in Israel. So, we found out that in Geringshof<sup>39</sup> [unclear] place, and if you are together with a group, you have a chance to go with the *Aliyah*<sup>40</sup> to Israel. We were there, I met my husband there also, he came to Bergen-Belsen. He was looking for his sister. I don't know, he was very intelligent and so brave, because he talked to us, [saying that] he was going to look for his sister and I thought "How can he find his sister? How can he go to the Russians? He can be killed again." Because he was so brave, and we got packages from the Red Cross from Switzerland and I know, he got a little bit of chocolate, he liked it very much. So, I said "Ok, I'll put in his jacket a little chocolate, he'll have a sweet way and he will find his sister if he wants to." And he found out that I gave him chocolate, he came back to ask and he said "Who put in the chocolate?" and Hilde was smiling to me, but I didn't tell her that, but he found out that I was it. So he had already a little pick on me. But in Geringshof I found there were lots of people from the Jewish army and a very young handsome man. He was a lieutenant in the American army, his name is [unclear] Slutzky. He came to us and helped us a lot. He found out that we wanted to go to Israel. Himself he was twenty-five years old.

**Int. 1:** And how old were you?

**II.:** Sixteen. He smuggled all kind of guns, we should be armed we should fight back. This guy, really he could be killed or be in jail, because why he did it for? He had such feelings to our Jewish people, that he has to do it, like I did it with the bread. So, after a while we became closer, I liked him very much, but he talked only, he was born in Israel, he talked Hebrew, English, and a little bit Jewish, but I was very shy and I thought "I will never get to him," but I had such feelings, I liked him very much.

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<sup>37</sup> Another Holocaust survivor who led the community of Jewish displaced persons through the establishment of a Central Committee of Liberated Jews that first served the interests of the refugees in Bergen-Belsen camp and then displaced persons camps throughout the entire British sector.

<sup>38</sup> In Hebrew it refers to the group of overseas volunteers who fought alongside Israeli forces during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Thousands of volunteers, Jews and non-Jews, arrived from all over the world.

<sup>39</sup> After World War II several thousands of liberated Jews remained in the camps. Joined by Jews liberated in Eastern Europe and repatriated from the USSR, they created the *She'erit Hapletah* (surviving remnant) in Germany. Expressing a strong Zionist stance, this group established several pioneer training centers, each with its own political orientation and practical program. Some were formed inside the displaced persons camps; others were independent fanning centers established on requisitioned German estates. One of these place is *Kibbutz* Buchenwald, established in Geringshof in June 1945: <<https://academic.oup.com/hgs/article-abstract/9/2/231/599399?redirectedFrom=fulltext>> (9 May, 2018)

<sup>40</sup> Hebrew term which refers to the immigration of Jews from the diaspora to the Land of Israel.

One day he said to my friend Regina Bacia,<sup>41</sup> also from the orchestra, in Jewish to tell me in German that I should not go to Israel, his mother lives in America and they would adopt me and I should go to school because in Israel one war after the other, and enough is enough, I should go to have freedom. But I know I have two sisters in Israel and he knows one of my sisters also, and I didn't listen to him. But after he left, I felt that something...you know, I liked him very much and since then I never heard about him. But now I know he's around, in a very happy marriage, wonderful wife, children, grandchildren, but we are still in contact to each other.

Ok, in Bergen-Belsen Freddie came back [1:05:00]. One transport went to Israel was illegal, the other one they gave us a chance illegally, [unclear] is gonna help us. We went to France on trucks like Germans, covered, the [unclear] with the guns and lots of brigada, brigade helped us, they went with us, sitting in front of us, in case we go to the border to see who's there like soldiers, we all are soldiers. We came on a ship called *Tel-Hai*,<sup>42</sup> it was a...freight?<sup>43</sup>

**Int. 1 and 2:** [simultaneously] Freight.

**II.:** Freight. And we went there almost two weeks, we almost sunk. Ok, after all the British planes<sup>44</sup> caught us on the water in Israel and we came on that ship to Atlit,<sup>45</sup> a camp where the British were around, and then again, a camp. And who was next to me? Freddie, all the time he was next to me. And, after that my sister found out that I am alive, no, [unclear] let my sister know in Israel that I am alive, everything he did. And at Atlit we had to make a list, of relatives, and I found out that my sisters are around, they found out that we are there, but they never visited me in Atlit. So I thought myself "Maybe they don't want me, maybe they

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<sup>41</sup> Probably Rivka Bacia (Regina Kuperberg) from Poland, who was the notes copier in the orchestra.

<sup>42</sup> Previously, a clandestine immigration ship. In 1946 the Mosad, bought it and adapted to carry 700 immigrants. On March 17th 1946, it sailed from the port of La Ciotat near Marseille, with 736 *maapilim* (Jews who immigrated illegally to Palestine during British control in the '30s and '40s). It was the first clandestine immigration ship who sailed from France after the Second World War: <[http://www.palyam.org/English/Hahapala/Teur\\_haflagot/hy\\_Tel-Hai](http://www.palyam.org/English/Hahapala/Teur_haflagot/hy_Tel-Hai)> (10 May, 2018)

<sup>43</sup> Pron. <freight>.

<sup>44</sup> On March 26th 1946 British aircraft discovered the ship and few hours later a British destroyer intercepted it and a boarding party boarded the ship. The radio operator succeeded to report the boarding to the Mosad and threw the transmitter overboard. On the next day, the ship arrived Haifa and all the *maapilim* were sent to the camp in Atlit. The Mosad escorts succeeded to slip away and avoid arrest.

<sup>45</sup> She says *Atlit*, but the name of the city is actually Atilt.

don't know what's going on." So I talked to myself "No, I go to be studying to Nahalal,<sup>46</sup> to go to school."

**Int. 1:** Was that a kibbutz?

**II.:** No, Freddie went to the kibbutz and I went with thirty other children of my age, a little bit older, to go to Nahalal, to finish my high school and we went by buses. But the bus station in Haifa, we were standing there to wait for the other buses to go to Nahalal to the school. Suddenly two girls came to me, they asked if I know Ilse Domke [crying emotionally]. It was me, they wouldn't recognize me. One was, the oldest one saw me when I was four, five years old. We started to cry, but I was my uncle, my cousin, he was looking exactly like my father so I had something in common. I said "My goodness." I run to them and they came to me exactly where I am. They said "No, you don't go away from us. You stay with us at Haifa." So, I went to Haifa, maybe for one, two years, but something was missing, I wanted to go to [unclear] and my sisters had to work very hard. One was a manicurist and the other one a hairdresser. And I didn't want them to feel pity for me, I wanted to work and I wanted to go to school.

**Int. 1:** How did it feel to find them, to see them?

**II.:** [smiling] I was very...I don't know, it was like...I know they were in Israel, but I was disappointed in happy, because I was disappointed, why they never came to see me in Atlit, because Freddie's brother came to see him in Atlit, and other people too. I never got a letter from them.

**Int. 1:** Did you ever asked them?

**II.:** No. I don't know. And I felt like I have not so much in common with my sisters and my friend from Auschwitz. I couldn't live that life.

And so I went one day, I went back to school, and they didn't want, Hana Meisel<sup>47</sup> the director, very good friend from doctor Weizmann, and she said "I'm sorry, you cannot come, you came too late," and I cried in my bed, I said "I cannot live in this city." I don't understand my sisters, they are very nice to me and they're helping me out, but I cannot hear when they're fighting who will pay for me for dresses and I didn't want it. So I said "No, I want to be by my own, I want to go to studying, what [unclear] told me, and I want to become a *mensch*.<sup>48</sup>" They said "Ok, you will study, and half day studying and half day you

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<sup>46</sup> It is a *moshav* in northern Israel, which is a type of Israeli town or settlement, in particular a type of cooperative agricultural community of individual farms pioneered by the Labour Zionists.

<sup>47</sup> Hana Meisel (1883-1972) was a Jewish agronomist, feminist and Zionist.

<sup>48</sup> Literally, a human being.

go in the army.” We have to go to training, also in school. So I was the best in school, because I wanted to be always the best. In the army I found a man, he was teaching us, he falls in love with me, but I couldn’t forget the other one [smiling]. And that is my end. And then later after that I came to *kibbutz* back [1:10:00] and I met Freddie there again, and we were also *shomrim*, it means...

**Int. 2:** Guards.

**II.:** Guards in the *kibbutz* because armies came. In the *kibbutz* we didn’t have enough bullets, but we had guns. So Freddie and I one night, they fixed us up, Freddie has to watch and I have to watch with a hand grenade. I was good in hand grenades. And there was shooting from all the places and I was so frightened so I run close to Freddie and we came too close and [smiling] got married soon after that.<sup>49</sup> Happy ending.

**Int. 1:** And when did you come to the United States?

**II.:** [sighing] Oh gosh, in United States we came in ‘59.

**Int. 1:** And you had then your three children.

**II.:** I had two children in Israel. First, we were in the *kibbutz*, and then we went to a farm [unclear]. We have to build our own houses, the men, I mean. It was very hard but we liked it, because it was our country and I wanted to do everything that has to do with Israel, I was so close. And then we came from the farm we went to Haifa. I couldn’t stay in the farm because I had heart problem from typhus and the sun and hard work was too much for me. I almost fainted all the time. I had two children there Juda Diament, [smiling proudly] very handsome guy now, and Amalia Diament, very pretty young lady, and then I came to Israel<sup>50</sup> and I got pregnant again.

**Int. 1:** In Los Angeles?

**II.:** Yes. And Stevie, very handsome young man. Very, very close to me. All my children are very close to me, especially to me. And then the last one was Elana, so all got names from my parents and my Elana [crying] is the name from my mother. My mother’s name was in Hebrew Miriam, her second name is Miriam. Elana means a beautiful bush in Israel, all

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<sup>49</sup> Fred Diament (1924-2004) was a German Jew of Polish descent. At 15 he was arrested by the Nazis in 1939 and sent to Auschwitz. Diament aided the resistance himself, and survived the death march out of Auschwitz in 1945 before moving to Palestine. He fought for Israel's independence as a member of the *Haganah*, the underground military. In Israel, Diament helped organize one of the first *kibbutzes* for Shoah survivors. He testified several times against his former captors in the Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals. His testimony helped convict six Nazi guards at Sachsenhausen and Auschwitz: <<http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/33d/33dTexts/FredDiamant04vLAT.htm>> (11 May, 2018)

<sup>50</sup> She means United States.

seasonings of blooms. Yehuda is Freddie's brother, he was a hero, got killed, and very devoted to all of us.<sup>51</sup> He has a lovely wife, beautiful lovely wife, and a beautiful grandchild, Ricky. It's unbelievable how beautiful. And she is so nice to me, like my own daughter. And Stevie is called after Freddie's father in Hebrew Shimon. His name is Stevie Shimon. And all our souls are still around. And Amalia is named after my husband's mother. So we all are still around.

**Int. 1:** You talked with me about God and about the religious feelings in the family. Some thoughts about that?

**II.:** *Ja*, when I was always in danger, my prayers, because my parents always taught us not to use God otherwise, only in prayers. So I always said "Shemà Israel, adonai elohenu adonai ehad, help us God, help us to survive." And it really helped me. It was like somebody helped me, somebody is behind me. I had nobody behind me. And I couldn't understand my parents were religious, why they died, is it because they never went to Israel, because other reasons couldn't be.

**Int. 1:** And those who went to Shanghai made it too. Did they go to Israel too?

**II.:** No.

**Int. 1:** [unclear] track there in Stockton.

**II.:** Yes, they live now in Stockton. Every time my uncle sees me, he cries. I remind him of his sister, who was my mother.

**Int. 1:** You mentioned something about when you were with the American gathering, you were riding in the buses...

**II.:** Yes, you remember you were behind me? [smiling]. We went to the [unclear] in Washington D.C., and from the airport I went with my husband, my sister-in-law, my brother-in-law, and my neighbor Ronnie Court. And Flo<sup>52</sup> [smiling at interviewer 1]. And when we came to Washington to the airport we took a taxi or bus I forgot [1:15:00].

**Int. 1:** Bus.

**II.:** Bus, to the city Washington. It was so beautiful. And my neighbor said "Look how gorgeous this is." Both sides were forced, I suddenly start to cry, so she said "What's the matter, Ilse?", I said "Nothing." She said "Come on, what's the matter?". So, I told her that

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<sup>51</sup> Leo Yehuda Diament was only 22 years old when he was caught, among others, trying to make contact with Polish partisans who could help organize a mass breakout from Auschwitz. Leo was the last of the three to be killed. Just before the hangman yanked the crate from under his feet, he cried out: "Courage, comrades! We are the last victims. Long live liberty!"

<sup>52</sup> Probably the name of interviewer 1.

reminds me [crying] of the camps there was a mass grave, they killed innocent children, people, everybody.

I went to Stockton to visit my uncle, it was the wedding of my cousin. And my daughter-in-law said "I wanna go home to my baby," we went by our car back home at night. It was so quiet and I saw from far away lights and houses and I start to cry again, so Shelley asked me "What's the matter with you?", I said "Nothing." So later I told my son, I said "Jeff, you know, it reminds me so much when we went by the cattle wagon train, we didn't know we were going to death and I saw from far away houses with lights, stars on the sky, not the red sky, come on look at that, how happy can people be poor or rich they have life they have freedom and I have to go with the train to death." It was very, very painful, this pain will never go away, it stays forever. But at home my children, most of them don't know about that. If they would go to the Hebrew school [unclear] and they saw all kinds of film, otherwise they would never know.

**Int. 1:** You don't talk to them about this.

**II.:** I don't talk about it. If they would ask me, I would. Sometimes Stevie asked me "Why? Tell me" and I told him. He said "Poor mummy, I love you. You are not only my mother, you are also my friend." Always he said it to me. Or Elana, she's my youngest, she said "Mummy, don't cry we will make you happy, I will have children and you will be very, very happy." And Jeff [smiling], I don't know, he doesn't want that I should remember that stuff.

**Int. 2:** Jeff is Yehuda?

**II.:** *Ja*, he's the oldest. I'm very, very proud of my family.

**Int. 1:** Some words that you might want to wrap this up with, anything you want to end with.

**II.:** I don't know, I'm afraid I will have nightmare also again.

**Int. 2:** Does it still hurt?

**II.:** Yes, but that goes away, but nobody can feel my pain. [crying] I hope it will never never, never happen to my children to all the generations, never again. And if something happens, we should fight, we should fight back and not going like a herd of animals through the fire and that's the story. I wish only we could make *Haggadah*<sup>53</sup> and tell all the people that one day or all week, that all fathers should tell their youngest child the story of what we all went

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<sup>53</sup> She probably refers to the *Haggadah*, a Jewish text that sets forth the order of the *Passover Seder*, which is a ritual feast. Reading the *Haggadah* is a fulfillment of the *mitzvah* to each Jew to "tell your son" of the Jewish liberation from slavery in Egypt as described in the *Torah*. Most probably, Mr Diament wanted to organize a similar event, remembering the Shoah and its victims.

through, like I was by myself to Auschwitz. That is really my biggest wish. We should never forget.

**Int. 1:** You're working towards having...*Haggadah*.

**II.:** My husband Freddie is working for that.

**Int. 1:** For a special day...

**II.:** And I hope he will do it. Because as long I live I want to see that, we should all be free and having a day for all members of those people who couldn't be with us [1:19:08].