

-TITLE- LIBUSE FRIES
-I_DATE- 7-23-88
-SOURCE- CHRISTIAN RESCUERS PROJECT
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY- FAIR
-IMAGE_QUALITY- GOOD
-DURATION-
-LANGUAGES- ENGLISH
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
-CONTENTS-

:33 What year was she born?
22 August, 1923 Where was she born? (Schellarase), a small village near Prague. There were several Jewish families living in this village, 5 or 6, before the war. Some of them emigrated to the U.S. Now there are no Jewish families there. They either died or emigrated.

:78 How big was the village?

Regular, 200 to 300 families.

:86 What did your father do?
Her father was an invalid from the first World War. He had a funeral parlor. Typical. Her mother had 5 children, and one died as a child. The others are alive. Her mother is still alive in the village; she is 89 years old. She visits her mother every month.

1:18 Were you the oldest?
No, the second. There were three girls and two boys. One of the boys died as a child. She has an older sister, a younger sister and a younger brother.

1:31 Was your family religious?
The family was Catholic, but after the second World War she was no longer a member of the Church. Before the war she was educated in the Catholic way, at Catholic school.

1:60 Was religion a big part of what your mother taught you as a child? Not too much, no.

1:68 What were the kinds of things that your mother taught you?
What type of person was she? She was educated to be modest, to love nature, to love human beings. She remembers a very good teacher in primary school who taught her good relations with other people and to be useful in life. This teacher did more than her duty. They made excursions to visit significant people, etc.

2:11 How old were you when you knew this teacher?
Secondary school. Before the beginning of the war.

2:22 What was your father like? What do you remember about your father from your childhood?

He taught the children much about his soldier's life during the first world war. He lost an eye and wounded his foot. He was a soldier for 18 years before he was wounded in the war. Her mother married him when he was an invalid.

2:54 But he could walk?

He could walk, but not as well as others, and he had only one eye. Her mother was an opera singer. Her father was also interested in music.

2:83 Which parent influenced you the most?

Her mother because she was with the children. She did not work and had more contact with the children than her father. The grandmother was in Prague, her mother's mother.

3:10 Were your parents friends with the Jewish families in the village, or were they separate? Her mother, before she was married, was a maid to a Jewish family. She remembered this family in a good way. They were nice to her and gave her gifts. There was no special relation to the Jews, but they took them like the others. There was no difference between the Jews and the non-Jews.

3:45 So Jews in your village may have had friends who were not Jews?

There were normal relations between Jews and others. The Jewish families were doctors or did scientific work. They were very intelligent people. Prague was very close.

3:69 When did you stop going to school?

After finishing school she worked in an office of a lawyer.

3:89 How old was she?

It was 1939, before the Occupation. She did not work long in the office because, after the Occupation, her father didn't want her to go to Prague. So she worked in the forest. She was 16.

4:18 When did you meet your husband?

1941. She worked in Prague in an electrical workshop. There were about 20 Jewish boys working there. She worked with 4 or 5 non-Jews. There she became friends with my brother. They worked there together for 2 or 3 months, then my brother was transported to (Reisenstadt)-ph.

4:51 Was it legal for Jews to be employed?

Yes. It was the beginning of the war. There was no possibility to continue their studies. If they had finished their studies, there would have been no good jobs for them.

4:68 Was he worried about being transported? Was he afraid about the Germans?

No. We were young. We thought that the war would be over in 2 or 3 months.

4:84 When he was ordered to go to Reisenstadt, was there any warning?

He knew it. He said it was not her duty to wait for him because he did not know when he would be back, and it was only the beginning of their relationship.

5:02 Did you know other Jews who had been sent away/deported before him?

No. He was with the first transport of only young men who went to Reisenstadt to prepare it for the others. It was called the Arbeitskommando. It was necessary to prepare this town for the others.

5:17 What did you do after he left?

At the beginning, Reisenstadt was a part of normal citizenship. Several times she went there to see him. It was not possible to speak to him, but you could see him in the group when he went to work. Myself, I went with her once. At this time, he lived in the barracks for the soldiers. It was possible to see them on the street. Once she legally went in the barracks by the window.

5:50 There were many Germans living in the town. She once had to stay the night with German people. There was a picture of Hitler, so she was afraid. But nothing happened. They did not know why she was there. There was once a possibility for him to work outside, and he wanted to go there so they could have better contact. But he could not. There was a group of young men who went to work at the mines at (Kelnoe)-ph. He was in that group. Once we visited that group together. There were the guards. I remember it like it was yesterday, the guards at the checkpoint.

I remember a group of Jewish men living in a house. It was not legal to go in, but we went in over the wall. We were hidden underground. I had a friend there. Somebody gave us a ride out. There were Czech policemen, but we escaped, and nothing came of it. It was only an example of the checkpoints, and how it was forbidden to go in. They were not free. They were slaves, separated from others. There were about fifty-odd men. Only 5 or 6 survived. They were very young boys of 18 or 19 years.

6:09 Were you worried about his being there?

She was worried. She cried when she got no message of him. He worked at these mines about one year. It was the best time because it was possible to go there. He worked at these mines until 1942.

6:42 At this point, how much did you know or think you knew about

what the Germans were doing to the Jews?

She thought it was inhuman to take the young people from their families and to put them without any reason in such conditions, to take them from liberty. She did not understand how it was possible for them to act in such an inhuman way--all the laws against the Jews and the Gypsies. They said that it would be better without the Jews.

6:75 At the time you knew that it was the Nazi intention to annihilate the people?

The anti-Semitic plans were known from the German propaganda. The speeches that Hitler made, the proclamations were all very harsh against the Jews, so from this it was comprehended that there were such aims to annihilate this people. At this time, there was hope that the war would end soon. We did not expect that it would take so many years. We knew about the plan but did not believe it would be possible to realize it.

7:07 And that is what she said? It is hard to separate out her story, because you are a part of this story. Yes. I said what she said.

7:12 When did you begin helping Anna?

We became friends when my brother was in the camp and after his departure we continued in our contacts. I at this time went to work on a farm with a Jewish group. She came several times to visit. There were about 10 or 12 young Jewish people working in the fields, and she came to visit. She knew that what happened to my brother was also in store for me. So, when in April, 1942, they came, I was to go with the transport. My parents and I got an announcement to go to Strassbourg, but I said I would not go unless I was forced. I decided to avoid the transport. She helped me. We discussed this, and she gave me her identity card. We are a little similar, so at the beginning she gave me her identity card without changing the photograph in it.

7:55 And what were you going to do without an identity card yourself?

She said in the office in the village to the local authorities that she had lost her identity card. It was at this time that we were under Marshall law. They made many investigations, and anyone who was at all different was shot. At this time, I lived under her name in Prague, and she was at the village. We thought it would be diligent for me to remain in her name. I went under her name with a transport of workers to Vienna. My brother did not know what was going on because he was at Reisenstadt in the mines. At this time it was especially dangerous for her to go to this place where my brother was because of the Marshall law, but she went anyway with some letters. Someone had told her that someone else had been shot for doing what she did. But she was brave and did not fear the dangerous conditions.

8:10 Why do you think you were able to do such dangerous things?

She hated the Nazis because she knew what they did with the people. She was young. One could say that what she did was like resistance against the Germans. Not only did she do it for my brother and for me, but also because she hated the system. It was well-known that the Nazis were like beasts.

For instance, once when my brother was in Reisenstadt and was living in the barracks, she went on the street and gave him a sign that at 6:00 o'clock she would meet him. A policeman saw her and took her away. She was afraid.

A Czech policeman?

Yes.

8:47 This was a time when she took my brother food. One experience I had was during the time of Marshall law. I was in Prague. I had altered her identity card, but it still had her photo on it. We were not too much similar, but a little, Once I went swimming on an island. The police came. They made people leave, and they looked at the identity cards as people left.

8:60 This was Czech policemen?

The Czech and the Germans. They came to me and looked on the identity card. The German said, "Is it she? No, it isn't she." He took the card to the Czech policeman. He said, "It is a photograph from the village, go on." I think that the Czech knew that it was not me on the photo, but if he had spoken I would have been hot. That is the one adventure that I had during this time.

8:70 So the Czech police corroborated with the Germans?

Some of them, not directly corroborated, but sometimes. They helped Czech people sometimes. Some of them were better than the Germans.

8:77 Did your parents know what you were doing at this time?

They did not know all. Some things she told them, but not all. When she was not at home, they were anxious, because she was only 18 years. Especially in the time of Marshall law. It was very dangerous to do anything against the Germans. Everyday you heard on the radios the names of people who were shot that day, without any reason, except that something was not quite right. If, for instance, someone visited someone else and remained there all night, and it was not written at the police headquarters, they shot him. Because they were looking everywhere for the men who assassinated (Heilberg)-ph. Then they were found, but it was in this time that there was a (Berechligeshte)-ph. near Kraków. At this time, she went there without even the identity card because it was already in my hands. And it was forbidden to be on the streets after 7 pm. So she went to sleep in the forest.

9:15 Once it happened that she went to visit my brother and it was not possible to go there. She came by a lane. He booked a room in a small hotel. The police came but they did not find her. She was in danger of her life. Perhaps she was young and did not realize it, but the danger was there. Once also she had an identity card for my brother. She went to him and asked him to escape. He refused because he was afraid that others may be punished when he escaped, so he remained.

9:41 I went to Vienna under her name, but we had changed the photo, and my photo was there instead of hers. I also changed her name so that she would not be in the evidence. But I did not know that from Vienna there came the police back to the place where she was living. I lived there for two months. It was tough for the workers. I worked in a kitchen. She was called to the office in the village. They asked her if she was in Vienna because there was a person there under her name. She told them that she had lost her identity card and had announced it to them.

9:74 In the case that something went wrong, she was to announce it to me. I received a note, and I knew that something was wrong, though I did not know what. She went away because she feared that she would be arrested. After 2 or 3 weeks, nothing happened, 80 she returned. I knew that something was wrong, but I did not know what to do. I was working in a restaurant. The brother-in-law of someone who worked in the restaurant told me he had a brother in Switzerland. I thought he could help me escape to Switzerland from Vienna. He promised to help, but after two hours he returned with the police. He had denounced me. I was arrested. I did not tell the police who I was, but I made up a name and said that I was from Prague. They transported me to the prison in Prague.

She was arrested too, and we met at the Gestapo. When we met, we laughed very much. The Gestapo man asked what I gave her in exchange for her identity card, gold? But I said that she just liked me, that we were friends. He could not believe that it was possible for anyone to do something only for love.

10:33 She was given to the civil court. Because she was not yet 21, she got 9 months in prison. If she had been over 21, she would have been sentenced to death. From prison, I went to Reisenstadt, and from there to Auschwitz. She was transported to another prison. In order to frighten her, they put her in the cells with those condemned to death. The others were afraid. She was not as afraid as they. After this, she returned home.

10:75 They arrested her because of the identity card?
Yes. She was sentenced for using her identity card to help a Jew. She was transported to the Sudetenland.

10:86 What were the conditions in the prison?
She went to work in a factory. There were also civil workers there who were unkind.

11:05 Who was in charge of the prison?

It was in the Sudetenland and run by Germans. The majority of the prisoners were Czech.

11:12 Was it SS people?

No, civilians. She was there from 1942 to 1943, for 9 months.

11:32 Did you know how long you would be there?

Yes. She was sentenced for 9 months, and she knew.

She then came home and again contacted my brother and others who had contact with people in prisons.

11:39 Was your brother still at the mines?

No. He was only there until the beginning of 1943. Then he went to Reisenstadt. In December of 1943 he went to Auschwitz.

11:47 Were you able to contact him at Reisenstadt then?

It was possible to write to Reisenstadt, so she got letters from my brother and my parents. It was not allowed to write to non-Jews, so my brother wrote to a Jew and he passed it on to her.

11:64 Did you know where Anna was?

Yes. I was in prison, then at the beginning of 1943 I went to Auschwitz, then (Bristenstad)-ph. I was building houses, working outside of the camp. There were two Germans who were our chiefs. They helped me send letters to her, and she sent me packages in their names. They were civil Germans. This was 1944.

12:03 Sometimes it was possible to send packages to Auschwitz. She sent my brother bread with garlic in it. It helped him.

12:22 Then I escaped to Prague at the beginning of 1945. I phoned her at work. There was a group of 4 of us who had escaped. The Germans did not have enough guards for the number of prisoners. We were increasing so greatly in number that we knew we would be liquidated. So we prepared for the possibility of escape. There were civilian guards, and our prisoner outfits had only a patch on the back to designate our status. It was easy to take off the patch and look civil. We met at Prague. She helped us by giving us money and food.

12:61 Was food a problem for you the last winter in Prague?

Her sister was a farmer, so she got some food from her sister. But all food was limited. There was not hunger, but food was limited.

12:76 Where was your brother at this time?

He left Auschwitz in July, 1944. He went to another camp where he was working. In Auschwitz, there was a selection to go away or to go to the gas chambers. He was not healthy, but he made it. He was sent to a camp in Poland to work in a factory. My brother has written his story of this time. It was not published, but he has written it for his grandchildren.

13:16 When was the last time that you saw him in the camps?
In the mines in 1943, before he went back to Reisenstadt. He returned to the village in May after the war. He was thin and sick. The women generally survived the prison better than the men. He was bald. So were the women.

13:36 While you are telling me this story, I get the feeling that he survived because he knew that you were there. Does he say why he survived?

There was always a risk. Working outside of the camps was better. His belief that someone was waiting for him and that the Nazis would be stopped helped him. When she was arrested, the police searched everywhere, but she had hidden the letters that my brother had sent her, and they did not find them.

13:67 When you helped Anna and the other women, were you at great risk?

There was always a risk. She had contact with other people who helped us. I got another identity card, from another friend, a Jew, who was living illegally. I got from him a certificate that allowed me to work.

1402 When my brother returned on May 11, 1945, there were a lot of dead people in the car in his transport. It was hard. He came first to Reisenstadt, but it was already liberated.

14:14 Did you (Anna) see her a lot after the escape?
Often, every day.

14:26 After the war, did other non-Jews know that you had helped Jews, and was that accepted?
She was not criticized.

14:42 Did you know anyone else who was helping Jews?
Several. There were friendships between Jews and non-Jews. The non-Jews went to visit Reisenstadt together.

14:45 When your brother returned, what happened?
There were some problems because we had no documents. It took a year to get the documents for the marriage. But they lived together immediately afterward.

14:66 And so you helped him get better?
She cared for him.

14:70 You are the first to be interested in this. There is nobody since the war who asked her what she did. She is touched. Her husband was banished from the Party in 1969. He has been unable to get anything published. He has had political problems. There was a persecution of the people.

14:84 I want you to know that I am interested. I think that what you did was heroic.

Young people are always more optimistic. They believe in the future.

15:01 Did the war change the optimism you had as a young person?

No. She remained optimistic during the war.

15:09 Was your brother a Communist before the War?

During the war.

15:14 So he supported Lubchek?

Yes. During the war, many people believed in Communism. It was our belief for the future. We did not know what sort of things Stalin was doing. It was necessary to believe in something during these conditions, in anything, God or the future. Without belief, it was the end.

15:33 Tell me about your life after the war.

She has two children and four grandchildren. At first, they lived in Prague. In the 1950's, because of political problems, they moved to where they live now. They were forced to leave Prague.

15:50 Do you know that it is as important that your children know what you did during the war as that they know what their father went through?

They are interested. But it is difficult for them to understand that such a thing was possible.

15:64 In 1942, when my parents were in Reisenstadt, they (the authorities) said it was true that we could go to Switzerland, but it was not. My parents were on the last transport from Reisenstadt to the gas chambers.

Did you see?

No. I was in Auschwitz.

15:71 Were there Jews in Reisenstadt who never left?

Yes. There were Jews there to the end of the war.

15:83 Does anyone have copies of what your husband wrote? Could we get a copy? Next July, I could get a photocopy of it made at the American embassy and take it out of Czechoslovakia with me.

16:00 Is your work included in what he wrote?

Only in connection with him. It is a record of his own experience.

16:17 People who did what you have done have received medals from Israel, the Holocaust Memorial, and all that one needs is testimony from a Jewish person. What he wrote could be considered testimony. What she did should be recognized, not just by me and Malka. Here one does not much speak about it, or about the Jews. The Jews are always the first who are persecuted.

16:49 So recognition from Israel would be dangerous?
They do not like it here.

16:59 The name in Israel for people like you is "Righteous Among the Nations."

16:73 Did your family have fears about your marrying a Jew?
No.

16:83 Has it been difficult for you to not have a faith, since the war?

No. Nobody asks here.
.END.