

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Marta Belebczuk
June 5, 1993
RG-50.028*0005**

PREFACE

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MARTA BELEBCZUK

June 5, 1993

Q. We're in Warren, Ohio, and we're doing the interview of one of Jehovah's Witnesses. And the events that happened to her, to Marta, took place in her life before she became one of Jehovah's Witnesses. And then while in the concentration camp, I understand that she became acquainted with Jehovah's Witnesses, so she's going to tell us the story. First of all, would you tell us your full name, your maiden name first, and then your married name.

A. My name is Marta (KIROCHENKA) and now I am Belebczuc.

Q. And would you spell your name for us, please.

A. M-a-r-t-a, that's Marta. And Belebczuc, B-e-l-e-b-c-z-u-c.

Q. Would you tell us your present address?

A. 2701 Palmyra Road, Warren, Ohio, 44481.

Q. Very good. And perhaps your phone number?

A. (216) 394-0593.

Q. Now, Marta, if you would, please, would you tell us where you were born and when.

A. I was born in 1923, January the 21st, and it was in Aleksandriya, that's a small city, and (KORSK) was our state in Russia.

Q. Would you tell us the name of your parents and your mother's maiden name, if you remember.

A. My father's name is (METROFAN KIROCHENKA). My mother was (YILDAKI AJEFCHERNOVA), later on (KIROCHENKA).

Q. What type of work did your father do?

A. Well, that was work as -- let's say as a farmer. We had some land.

Q. And your mother worked on the farm as well?

A. My mother too.

Q. How many brothers and sisters did you have? And would you name them in their order of age.

A. I had five sisters and two brothers. My oldest sister (PELAHAYN), next was a brother

USHMM Archives RG-50.028*0005

2

(PANTELAY), then sister Maria, (ADARIA), Alexandra, and my brother was (CELE), and I was the last one.

Q. So you were the baby of the family?

A. Right.

Q. What was your religious background in Russia?

A. As it was in Russia, most of the people were Russian Orthodox, and so my family were Russian Orthodox. But for some reason, my mother used to say what the Bible were predicting that very hard times would come, that people would be turning Godless, not believing in God, and very bad living conditions. She said when she was a little girl, she was born in 1877, so that was before 1900, they were reading Bible, old men, in the wintertime, especially, and they were saying that. And she said what I heard then, now I see it's going in fulfillment. Being as I were in school, I would ask her: "Well, who wrote the Bible?" Because I am now in the seventh grade and we know lots of scientists, philosophers, none of them were able to predict the future, who were writing Bible, who could do that. She said: "I don't know, I never read the Bible." Of course, my parents were not educated at that time.

Q. I see. Well, in your hometown, was there a church at all?

A. Yeah. We had a beautiful church, was built probably during ten years, and it was very beautiful. And of course people were going to the church till about 1932, then Communists closed it down.

Q. Okay. Now, in 1933, we know Hitler came to power. So if you were born in 1923, you were ten years old. Do you recall any talk in your hometown about Hitler taking over in Germany and what might possibly happen or as the years went by shortly thereafter?

A. At that time, of course people didn't have much communication about world conditions, neither newspaper or otherwise. And to my recall, was nothing mentioned by anybody, especially in the small places. And then we had in 1940 -- 1933, by Communists made starvation, so people were starving in the whole region there. They took away from people grains, people who lived in their villages, because people would not want to go in a collective farm, give up their land and be under communistic arrangement.

Q. Interesting. What began to happen after Hitler went into Poland? Do you remember that now probably more, there was more talk about that? Because by then you would be 16 years old, 16 or 17 in 1939, when Hitler went into Poland. Do you remember the attitude of people in your hometown?

USHMM Archives RG-50.028*0005

3

A. We did not hear about Hitler occupying Poland. But I think at that time, in 1938 or before, Russia occupied part of the Polish territory that was bordering with Russia, was called Ukraine. And my brother was in the army and he was there.

Q. Your brother was in the Russian army?

A. In the Russian army.

Q. Very interesting. What's the closest town, I meant to ask you before, what is the closest large town to your village?

A. (KORSK) was 120 kilometers and (HARDKO) was 400 kilometers.

Q. Okay. This gives us an idea of where you were located. Okay. So what began to happen to you, now, when Germany turned on Russia?

A. That was in 1941 when they started war in June. And about by August, they already come as far as where we were living. We were occupied very fast. There was a main highway next village from us and their army troops went very fast in the trucks and so on. Our village was on the side and we didn't have the troops in our village, but next village.

Q. And what began to happen? What was it that you heard now the Germans were coming?

A. Well, general feeling of people was fear, unexpected, unknown what will happen. And to our village, they came around September, just maybe a few German men was translators. They were sure there were no Russian army in our village and around.

Q. Were the German soldiers taking food and supplies from the farmers?

A. From the next village where they went through where my sister used to live, they did. They would come, especially around the evening time, and they would go to the people, the houses. And if people had something like chicken or ducks or geese, they would kill them, butcher them, and find something, some kind of woods -- if the people didn't have the wood for cooking, they would take their fences and would cook for themselves, without paying, without asking.

Q. And that was in June of 1941 that that occurred?

A. Well, it was around August because it took them the distance to go.

Q. To come into Russia. They came in very quickly, though?

A. Very quickly, yes.

USHMM Archives RG-50.028*0005

4

Q. Now, what began to go through the minds of your family, can you recall any of that, as to what was going to happen, can you remember your parents talking about it?

A. Well, my father died when I was only four years old. My mother lived till after the war, she died. I had a brother, older brother, (PANTELAY) was married, and his wife, couple children, we lived together. And we were in generally in fear of unexpected. And they would say well, we didn't have the good life under communistic rule, but this foreign country would not give us much better living conditions, so.

Q. Now, when were you picked up, and who was picked up in your family, and what happened to you?

A. That was next year, 1942, starting in the springtime, the Germans start to take people, young people, boys and girls, mostly, from 15 years old and older, to the country. And we heard that from other villages they were taking. And I had the feeling that probably I will be taken because I was the youngest one. And so I was taken in May 1942. It was one Saturday afternoon that a boy from the village was sent from the government in the village, the Germans are asking so many people from village to be sent to Germany, and government wrote down the names that they chose. And they come by and said you get ready and tomorrow you will have to go to Germany. And there was nothing you could explain to anybody because we were just told that's it. And during that night, village policemen, couple of them, they got drunk and they went to us, to people who were told they will go tomorrow to Germany, they went to them during the night, pounding on their doors and saying get up and get ready and go. So we would get up and come together, the ones that were told to go. And we said to ourselves, we were told that it's tomorrow morning, it was Sunday. And we didn't go till Sunday morning. On Sunday morning we came to the office place and from there we were taken.

Q. How did your family feel that you were going to be leaving?

A. Well, they were very much perturbed because the policemen were threatening, said if you don't go, the whole family will be taken. And I myself did not believe that we will be taken to Germany. I rather thought in Russia, there are many lands under communists where no villages, that people would be taken from villages to work on their land during the summertime. So I thought that's what the Germans are doing with us, they will take us somewhere to nearer so that collective farm, called (SOFHOSEN), and we would work during the summertime. Till we were brought to the next point, about 15 kilometers, (CHIOTKEN) they are called, and I saw we were brought from many other villages, and then there was the talk that we will go on a train and that we will be taken to Germany.

Q. Okay. So now when you were taken to the train station, what type of a train was it? How many people were with you?

USHMM Archives RG-50.028*0005

5

A. That was a train that usually cattle is transported. And was just a little bit straw on our floor where we had to place ourselves. And in that train, we were taken from one point to another until we were filling up so many train --

Q. Kept picking up more people along --

A. More people.

Q. How many people were in your car?

A. It's hard to say, but it's around 50.

Q. Okay. Was that standing room only or could you sit down?

A. Well, was place to sit down. Yeah.

Q. Did they have toilet facilities and things of that nature for people?

A. Oh, nothing of that kind. When they would stop somewhere before they reach the main station, maybe for that purpose, so people would just jump out and run out. And some were behind the train and this was -- and the policemen, of course, they were watching that we would not run away.

Q. Okay. Now, how long did it take for you to get from your hometown to where you were going? And what was the name of the place you went to?

A. It took probably around five days till we reach Germany. And what was the town? Of course I don't think we even knew because we were placed there in old textile factory that was closed. And it was a couple stories high and was dirty floors where the textile machines used to be located. And there were a little bit straw put here and there. And that's where we were kept for about -- some of us, about two, three days. And from that point, their companies or factories would send their representative and how many of these people they need, they would take them. So that's how we were taken there. So I was taken from there to a place called Hof and it was not far from Czechoslovakian border.

Q. And was that in Germany?

A. That was in Germany, yeah.

Q. What type of a plant was it?

USHMM Archives RG-50.028*0005

6

A. Where I worked, it was some factory where they produced electrical parts for all kind of electricity. So we were cutting out of the metal the small parts, cleaning them and assembling to some extent.

Q. All right. Now, when you arrived at that town, how were you treated when you got off the train? Do you remember the events of that particular day when you first got there?

A. Of course it was the beginning of June, the weather was nice and sunny. And I remember people around the station, train station, whether they were going in or out, and they were looking strangely on us. Of course it was some distance between them and us. We couldn't hear or see exactly reaction except that, you know, we thought they are wondering who we are and so on.

Q. By that time, did you have any special type of clothing you were wearing or did they cut your hair?

A. No. That we just wore coming from home, we were in our own clothes, with our possession. This was where we were taken just to work in ammunition factory that belonged to some company. And we were again put in the old textile factory, two story high, where the floors were dirty with that oil soaked through. And there were already some people in there brought before us. And of course those floors were washed some, but they couldn't.

Q. Did they give you a new type of clothing to wear at that time or did you just wear your --

A. No. This was a civil camp for the workers, like there were only Russian people in that camp, and this was nothing of concentration camp or something, it was just a civil camp.

Q. Now, what type of work did you do there? What time did your day start and end?

A. We were working 12 hours each day, six days a week, starting 6:00 o'clock in the morning till 6:00 o'clock in the evening. Next week we were working from 6:00 o'clock evening to 6:00 o'clock morning, took turns. And we had about 45 minutes for our lunch.

Q. Which consisted of what?

A. Of some soup. That was every day some soup with a little bit of potatoes that we could see and a little bit of cabbage. And sometime there is no cabbage, maybe it was spinach or some other green vegetables in there. In the morning was slice of bread and just cup of tea. Yeah, a thin slice of bread. Yeah.

Q. Well, what did you think at this time, the way you were being treated along with all of these other people?

A. I was thinking and thinking about that it's impossible to see these conditions. We were brought here, we are working, and they don't give us even the food we need. And I was hoping

USHMM Archives RG-50.028*0005

7

that it would not be long till we go home. But when we were talking to one older man who could understand Russian and we asked him how long we will be here. He said well, you will be here as long as war goes on, and that will take long time because Russia is big countryside barrier till we go through, then we have to conquer Great Britain and America, and that will take a long time. That was a scary thought.

Q. Now, what were the conditions like in your barracks where you stayed? You stayed, no doubt, with all women?

A. Yeah, all women. We were in that factory on second floor was our bedroom. It was a big room where the machines used to be. There was 120 beds, that's where we were sleeping. Two-story beds, bunk beds, and they were very close to each other.

Q. And was one person in the bed or two?

A. One person, yeah. Yeah, this was not the concentration camp. That was later on in the concentration camp.

Q. Okay. Now what happened was you were going to work every day, you began to lose weight probably?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. Did you get sick at all?

A. And being young, I was not sick but weakly, weak, so. But everybody was feeling the same, and so, personally, you don't feel exception in such an environment.

Q. How did the German soldiers treat the women?

A. We were guided from our place at camp, where we stayed, to our factory by a guard. We would go in a line like soldiers, four rows, and back home too. There were no soldiers around us in this civil camp. But where we worked in the shop, there were German men who were fixing our machines, who were masters, they were called. And some of them were, how I say, prejudiced against us, they were real mean. If the machine breaks something, of course not our fault, they would be very mean. We would not understand what they say. But some of them were kind to us, they would just do what they need to do. But we could see they couldn't talk to us, we could see that they would be punished. And like one Czechoslovakian master who was working there and he could say some words in our language, but he would say a few words, he was very cautious.

Q. Now, how long did you stay there?

USHMM Archives RG-50.028*0005

8

A. I was in this civil camp since '42 till 1944 in August. And a year after I was taken from home, in that one year, they permitted us to write one letter home. And they told us don't write much, write and say you are here and everything is all right, so that your letter would go. So that's what we did. And my family received my letter, although I didn't have answer. But a year later, my cousin was taken from Russia to Germany and we lived next to each other. He had my address from home and while he was in Germany, he start to write to me letters. And he wrote what the Germans did during that one year, they were pushed back and forth, and they destroyed, burned many villages and many people were killed. And then in 1944, where he was not far from the French border, more people were brought from Poland, around Warsaw, and they were with him by the farm, living, working there. And he said they were telling that Germans are pushed back very fast. And in one of his letters, he said that soon, from what these people tell, that Russians come to Germany and they will do what Germans did in Russia. And that letter landed in the hands of Gestapo. From time to time they will open our letters and censor them. This was the reason why I was put in a prison.

Q. Oh, then you went from there to a prison. Now, how did they treat you when you were picked up?

A. I was put -- the first time a policeman came and told me to go with him to the police office, he wants to interrogate me. But at that time I couldn't understand English and -- I mean German, so he brought me back. And then the next time, it was Monday, he come and told me I should get all my belongings and go with him. So he brought me to the prison. And so I was put in one room where there was three. Polish girls and that was our interrogation. And from that place, this was in Hof, the city where I used to live, after few days, we were put in a train of prisoners, women in one wagon and men in the other, and we were start to be collected to be transported to the punishment camp. So like from Hof I was taken to Plauen, (HAMNITZ), Dresden, Nurnberg. And by Nurnberg, there was punishment camp, so-called, by (LONGENSAYER) on the place. There they were, prisoners were working making the bricks, bricks out of clay, and there was a factory that burned them out. And that's where we were working.

Q. Now, when you were there, what time did your day start there? What type of food? What was your treatment like during those days?

A. This was a Communist punishment camp because the people were punished. And starting like women were taking off their shoes, we couldn't wear the shoes, we have to work barefoot. Men were barefoot and were taking off their shirts, they had only pants. And this was a bad punishment, especially for men, because most of them never were exposed to the sun day by day, long days. And some of the men that were carrying the bricks from one place to another, and there they were building for policemen houses and prison, and some men, in a very few days, their skin on their bodies burned so badly, just like somebody poured on them boiling water and then it would break skin. And from what we heard, a few of them died of that.

Q. So once again, they kept the men and women separated?

USHMM Archives RG-50.028*0005

9

A. Separately, yeah. It was close to each other but we were separate. We were, the women, in a new barrack built, where there were wooden beds but there was no mattresses, nothing at all. So we were sleeping on a bed on the boards. And we were not permitted our clothes have with us. There was a special place where we had to leave and just clothes what we had on. And working barefoot carrying the bricks was hard. And also we worked there where they would make the brick or the part from maker of clay in Germany for covering the houses and also pipes. So we had to -- they were placed on conveyor somewhere where it was made and conveyor would bring in one building on the second floor where we were there, we would have to take off and put on a shelf for the bricks or those pipes to dry. And then next time, next day we would put them again on elevator, it goes down to where they get burned out, processed. And then some days we were carrying those bricks from one place to another, to the homes that were built to the policemen or to the prison there was built. And it was hard, five bricks to carry, it was hard. And policemen would stay along the road and schnell, schnell, schnell, that meant fast, fast, we need to run. So it was -- we worked there from morning, I don't know from what time, till we had lunch, and then we would come and have some supper. And then after supper, we had to go and carry those bricks. During the day, we were working mostly in that where the process of drying those bricks and so on. So I really don't know of how many hours it was. It was sun setting, it was in September -- in August and September. So I was there in that punishment camp for six weeks. That's where I was first time interrogated. There were Russian families and Russians, White Russians that I guess were with Hitler and they were used as policemen, policewomen. And so I was interrogated there in Russian language by them. And first I found out why I am there. Of course policeman came with me in my other camp and took all my letters, everything what is written. And so they went through and they said: "Who was it your brother wrote to you?" I said: "He was my cousin and he was taken a year later in Germany and he had my address and he was writing to me what happened there to my family and how his life was there." "And what else did he wrote?" I said: "Well, it's a year and a half by now and I don't recall everything." And then he read himself in one of the letters: "He wrote here to you that soon Russians are coming here and they will do what German soldier did over there." I said: "Probably he did write but I don't remember." "And so he's your brother and what he thinks to avenge on Germans, that's what you think." I said: "Well, first of all, he is not my brother, he is my cousin. And what he think, I don't know, but I didn't think that." That was the whole interrogation.

Q. Did they hit you or did they --

A. He was scaring me. He was sitting in a building inside and the window was open and I was staying lower down outside and he was interrogating me. "And what else he wrote to you?" I said: "Well, only what I could recall, I told you." "Go in your barrack for five minutes and think and come back; if not, then you will be beaten." So I went in my barrack and I stand on my knees and I prayed to God. And at that time, before I was taken to this punishment camp, I was associating in a civil camp for about a year with Evangelists, there were two girls Russian, Evangelists, they had New Testaments, and more of us girls would associate with them. In summer, on Sunday, we were permitted to take benches outside and put them around. And they would read few Scriptures and then we would sing the songs. And I liked it. And I remembered the words of Peter, he said if you suffer as a Christian, that is

USHMM Archives RG-50.028*0005

10

pleasing to God. But if you suffer as evildoer, then you will deserve punishment. These words for some reason stuck in my mind. So at that time, I strongly believed on God even more. Of course I believed on God because my mother at home, every morning, she would get up and get washed and stand herself in front of icons that we had in the corner and she would pray our Father and then another Russian -- they started a prayer to them, and in reality it was Russian Orthodox creed what they believe. I believe in the only true God and his Son and I believe in Apostolic Church and I believe in the resurrection of the dead ones in the future. And so I remembered all that. So when he sent me in my room to think for five minutes and come back, so I came in my room and stand on my knees and I was praying to God. Of course, to me at that time, dear God and Jesus was one person because as so religion each, God is Jesus. So I came back. And he said: "Well, what do you remember?" I said: "Well, I don't remember anything more." I was very, very much afraid because at that punishment camp, they beat the people, especially when they were interrogating for something like they call it political reason. This was in my case like political prisoner. I saw two women who were beaten. And I heard by other that they hit 25 times with whatever it was, stick or something. It was real bad. So I was very much afraid and I prayed to God to help me. So I was not beaten. But it probably was before this my interrogation, we were working with Russian men who were prisoners like we, and they had to drill the well, like put the pipe in the ground, and it was not done with machine. They had to turn around that pipe till it goes down. And they couldn't, when it went down, probably meeting the stones. There was a chief of that camp, he was a young person, and he was hollering at them, commanding. And there was other police who was Russian men. And so he gave them command, this chief of the camp gave a command to policemen, take them and give them five beatings. So he made them first run into a building not too far. And when they come back, some of them had torn up their pants, you could see holes and you could see there where they were beaten on their back part. And so I had very much reason to be afraid that if I would be beaten.

Q. The camp that you were in, was it all people from Russia or was it all mixed up?

A. They were mixed up. There were Polish and Greeks and from others, yes, they were mixed up, yeah.

Q. There were some from Greece?

A. Greece, yes, uh-huh. In fact, one of the Greece was a young woman. When we were taken to work in that -- from that camp to the factory where we would put pipes and bricks to dry, and from there we were guided by one policewoman. And they were all of those Russians, White Russians. And this one young Greek woman, she run away. She somehow deviated. And she was found and she was beaten and kept in a dark room for so many days. It was a bad punishment. So I know she was a woman from Greece.

Q. How about some Jewish people, were they in that camp with you?

A. In that camp, there was one young girl. And I saw her in one of the rooms. Like we had the rooms and the doors were always open. So for some chance there were other Russian women

and girls in those rooms, I was in that room, and she was sitting on her bed. She had a very nice maroon dress on and very pretty young girl, and she was young. If she was 15, maybe, maybe not. She probably was not because she was not taken to work. And from all the talking, the other woman said that she is not Jewish, I know her from home. But I thought she was defending her, that she was Jewish. And that when she was brought, I don't know. And she was there in the room. So I had the idea that that person was a Jewish person.

Q. How about Jehovah's Witnesses, were they in the camp?

A. Not in this punishment camp. Now, after six weeks, many people who were interrogated like I was, they were destined for a concentration camp. So, so many of us were put in a train and we were taken again from one prison into another till we were gathered more on the train and we were brought to the concentration camp Ravensbrück. We heard that many times in our watchtower, Ravensbrück. I think it's not far from Berlin. So we were brought there on a train at night. And train came close to the station. And there we were walking, I remember, and the scent, we were brought to the big gate and they opened it and brought us in, in one building where we had only a standing place with women. Men were -- there was also men's camp next to it. So we were staying there till morning. And in the morning, we had to go through the shower, a big room. And we had to leave all our possessions in that room, right there where we had that.

Q. Take off all the clothes?

A. Yes. Before we entered the shower room, take off all our clothing. And when we came out of the shower room, they gave us their own clothing. At that place, they gave us to wear probably from people like we clothing, civil clothing. And mainly they left all our possessions because there were, of course, people that had watches or something of worth. So I was there about couple weeks in Ravensbrück. And with me were some women and girls that were with me in the punishment camp. And while we were working outside in punishment camp, a couple older women, I worked with them, we were talking somehow about God and I told them that I was reading the Bible, I thought it was New Testament, and I know about how Noah lived through the flood, how God made the flood to destroy the people, and Lot, in his time, were taken out from Sodom and Gomorrah, I knew that. And they would tell me: "Marta, tell us more and more from Bible." And I said: "Well, I don't know much." And I was feeling sorry I didn't learn more. So this girl, one of them, was sleeping in bed in this Ravensbrück, there were two to bed, two-story bunk beds, and they are so close to each other. And there was a sister from Poland and she was giving her witness to this girl who was with me previously in punishment camp. And she told her well, there was one girl with her in punishment camp that believed on God and she was saying something about Bible. So I remember one time, one day this girl came with another girl, and as close as she could see me on the top bed, and I noticed they were talking something about me, but they went away. It was later on I found that this sister, Jehovah's Witness from Poland, talked to this girl and she asked her to show who I am, the girl who talked to her in punishment camp. But we were taken after couple weeks to another concentration camp, from Ravensbrück to Salzgitter, it was a smaller one, and we were again brought to the shower room, 250 of us.

Q. It was told to me by some of the women that I interviewed that that was the first time they had ever disrobed in front of other women, they felt humiliated.

A. That's very true. And they cut off on many women their hair when they checked if for they had lice in their hair, they would have cut off their hair, either shorn or just cut short. And in this camp in Ravensbrück, one day we were outside. Of course we had to get up at 6:00 o'clock in the morning and go outside of the barracks, stay in the lines for one hour, they were cleaning those rooms. And during the day, I saw a Jewish woman were brought to this Ravensbrück, they were dressed like at home, nicely dressed, and they were looking not skinny, they were just brought from home, and they were with their children. There were children, some of them they were carrying, some of them were I presume till seven years old, even the boys were with them. And they were carrying, some of them, some baggage, some of them, blankets, and they were put in a separate camp. So I saw that these were there. I didn't know from what country, but they were Jewish people.

Q. Okay. So they kept the Jewish people in Ravensbrück together. And Jehovah's Witnesses were together?

A. I don't -- I did not learn about Jehovah's Witnesses in Ravensbrück. I learned later on from this sister that was witnessing to me, this is the girl that the other girl pointed at me. Later on, now we were taken together in one camp and she told me about Ravensbrück, that there were Jehovah's Witnesses. And being as she was Jehovah's Witnesses, she knew that many Jehovah's Witnesses are in concentration camp. So she said when she was there, she was looking for them. And she had a chance to talk to Jehovah's Witnesses in Ravensbrück and they told her that you will be with us here in Ravensbrück. By now, in 1944, Jehovah's Witnesses were not taken to other camps where other prisoners were put to work in ammunition factories. Because Jehovah's Witnesses were punished many times refusing to work in ammunition factories and they would not work, so they said you will be here left. And Jehovah's Witnesses were working there in Ravensbrück only in the camp. In fact, one day, and from morning, we were outside, it was around September, October, we were standing outside and I noticed, looking around, and asking the other prisoner, I noticed a triangle on people's sleeves and a number. "For what is that?" It was a green triangle. She said: "Oh, those people are for political, they are political." And there was a green -- oh, these are for stealing. And with the black triangle, those are for prostitution. And here walks an older person, a woman in her late fifties, she was carrying empty bucket on her arm and she had the purple triangle. And I asked the girl: "For what is that woman?" She said: "Oh, those are the people who believe in Bible and they tell to other people from Bible and Hitler doesn't like that. That's why they are here." That shocked me because I am from Russia and I know Communists persecuted people who believed on God, religious people, they were put in prison and many were killed. I thought this is -- Germany is Christian country, that Hitler himself must be, how could he beat people for believing in Bible, put here? They must know something in the Bible that I don't know. Because I had the chance to read a little bit. I thought what do they know? They must know some secret that I don't know. And I look at that woman as far as I could see her, she went by,

and her composure was so peaceful, not disturbed like most of the prisoners. We didn't know what will happen to us, will they kill us, poison us. Because we noticed the German people very much perturbed, that was in 1944 in October, like they were losing war. And I thought that's unusual for person to be so peaceful in her composure. Of course later on I understood why. So then I --

Q. You were transferred then from Ravensbrück to this other camp?

A. Yes. So after a couple weeks, we were put again, we went through that shower, 250 of us. After shower, then they gave us concentration camp dressing, dresses and jackets, they were white stripes, gray stripes, gray and blue stripe, and here we were given numbers and then triangles of material. My number was 77,117. Of course, not all those thousands were there because there were like we, transported in others. And I was given, of course, red triangle, that's political prisoner, to sew on, and most of us. And here while we were sewing on these numbers and triangles, in one corner of this big room of 250 people, women, all at once we hear the German policewoman was with us, she was hollering. And we said what's going on? And here she slapped somebody. And so we were what is asking each other. Eventually we learned from each other that there was in the corner one girl who refused to sew on this triangle, the red triangle on her sleeve. I thought oh, poor girl, why should she let herself to be slapped not doing what they say. And later on, I found out that was this sister Maria from Poland who was Jehovah's Witness. And by mistake, she was put with us to be taken to that concentration camp where we were taken to work in ammunition factory. So when they gave her this triangle, she refused, she said she is not political prisoner, she is one of Jehovah's Witnesses, she knew that Jehovah's Witnesses had the purple one. And of course policewoman, since she was sent there, that's it, she would not go to any details or anything. So since she would not sew on the triangle, she made the other girl to sew it for her. And then in the morning we were put on a train, of course the same wagons where the cattle is transported, we were sitting there, and they gave us piece of bread and little tiny piece of margarine to put on. And somehow, somewhere we had -- somebody had a knife or they were given, so we were putting that margarine on a slice of bread. And we were sharing it. And I remember this girl that I didn't notice her, the one that was slapped on, but she was sitting next to me and said: "Well, when you finish this margarine putting on your bread, will you give me the knife?" And I said "yeah," so I gave her. And I remembered her, she was sitting next to me, her face. So when we were brought into this other concentration camp, Salzgitter, and we were put there in the barracks, there were 500 -- 250 already and we were 250, that was 500, and so we were put there in rooms according to the nationality. So we were Russians with Russians, Polish with Polish. And we started to go after a few days, they took us also work in ammunition factories, where we were -- my job was to cleaning the shells, the new ones, and to put them. And this Maria, when she was sent to go to factory to work, she told whoever it was she would not go to work in ammunition factory because she is Jehovah's Witnesses and we don't produce things for killing people. So eventually she was interrogated by sheriff of that camp. And he said: "Well, if you refuse, you know what we do with you, we shoot you." And he said: "Well, worse what we'll do with you, we'll put things here where we hang you up here in the camp, everybody will see you will be hanging." And she didn't scared, she didn't go. She told me this later on. So they sent her to kitchen to

work, so she was working there in the kitchen. And so with her in the kitchen were working two older women who were with me in the punishment camp before, with whom I worked and to whom I told about Noah, how was the deluge and about flood. And when Maria gave them witness there in the kitchen working with them, they told: "Well, we have one girl that was with us in punishment camp and she is with us in our room that she is like you are believing she knows from Bible." And Maria said: "Well, would you bring her tonight after work in my room" -- where she was in one barrack -- "I like to see her, I like to talk to her." Maria thought maybe I am one of Jehovah's Witnesses. So when they come from kitchen, they told me: "You know, Marta, there is Maria works with us, she is like you, believing in God. She wants to see you. Would you go with us? She told us where she is." "Oh," I said, "that's very nice, there is somebody like me believing on God. Yeah." So I went with them in the room. And this Maria, she is Polish, she lived a part of Poland that is very close to Russian border and there were people almost half and half, half Polish, half Ukrainian, and they talk Polish and Ukrainian. And then Maria was working by farmer -- she was taken from home not to Germany but to Austria, she worked by farmer. And farmer had the Russian man who was a war -- prisoner of war. And so she was witnessing to him and she learned some Russian language. It's a wonder how Jehovah God prepares sometimes so wonderful for benefit of people. So when she start to talk to me, when I come in her room, she asked me from where I am and if I believe on God. Yes. Where do I work? I said there in ammunition factory. She said how do I compare my belief in God with what I am doing? And as it is, Baptists, Evangelists, they all believed that they had to obey whatever government tells them to do. And so I said: "Oh, we have to obey government." And the other girls in her room are listening. So she said: "Well, we need to obey God, don't we, and what he says." Anyhow, she didn't go with me on this controversial subject. She gave us a little bit of witness and then she asked me if I would want to come to her tomorrow after work. I said yeah, I would. I was glad that she is the one who believes on God, and I saw her strong faith and that she knows Bible. And I would like to have that strong faith like her. She was not fearful in her composure and so on. But I thought oh, I can't go to her, I am ashamed because I don't know from Bible and I am working what she says is not what God's will is. But then the next day come, I said well, I promise her I would go to her and I will go. So I was comprehended to meet her again, but I won't hear her and I won't learn, and I promise. I went to her next day and she told me more what the Bible teaches and so on, and I liked it.

Q. What was it that appealed to you, do you remember, in particular?

A. I don't remember in particular. But it's something what God will do that these conditions will not remain, that God has better conditions. Probably she told me God's kingdom, what if I know Lord's prayer, and that's what I liked, that promise, that hope, and her confidence. And Maria was pioneering before, and so she was in that full time. And then one time when Russians, before Second World War, took over that part of Poland in 1939, like Hitler took Poland, so they were under Russian rule and they couldn't get no more spiritual food, like Watchtowers, Wakes, books. So when they had single copies brought for them, so she was the one who had the time to rewrite the articles from Watchtower.

Q. She was an interpreter?

A. She was just in Polish, like one Watchtower in Polish language from Poland was smuggled into that part where she lived that was occupied by Russian, there was border, a new border made, Russia, and the Hitler that occupied Poland. So while she was rewriting the Watchtower, making more copies for study, so she got so good acquainted, that made her very strong spiritual, she knew much of the Bible, and she was very good prepared to witness for me. And so from that day on, every day I would come from work, I would go to her and she would tell me more and more. And that was such a support for me because I was a person that was very much perturbed what will happen to us. I knew from school that there was not such things known that time would come like that, where never in the human history I thought things happen like that that we were taken like prisoners to other country and we were treated so badly. And that knowledge she was sharing was a great relief for me. And like she talked to me maybe from in November. And by March, I was getting so strong convinced that it's wrong for what I do, and I was deciding to quit working the job. And I told her: "Maria, I think I will tell them that I won't do this job because this is I'm making preparation for to kill the people and it's not God's will." And she said: "Well, that is right decision on my part." But it was coming into April 1945. And she said: "From what is seen, the war will be over very soon, they are losing, Germans, and they are very mean and mad. They will not believe you that because you believe on God and you don't want to do it. They will ask you who told you, how did you start, first of all, to work here and now you refuse? They would know that you heard from me. And we will both be punished. Maybe you reconsider and continue for this short time. I know we soon will be free." And it was on April 9th that they close up those factories in Salzgitter, small cities, because occupation was so close. And we were put in a train, 500 of us women, again. This time was a train that usually coal is transported, it's open top. We were 500 in those couple of the -- what do you call them -- wagons. And then we came to the Drittel, the camp was called Drittel, in English that means third, where were 900 men concentration camp. So these men were put on the same train and we were taken somewhere. And we were taken not too far, to German city Celle by a big city Hannover. And we -- our train stopped before village, the main station where the freight trains are staying. And next to our train was a train covered up where were soldiers, many were Russians with Germans, and German soldiers, we saw them coming out. And here at once a couple planes flew so low by, observing our train, they flew by and they returned and they dropped bombs.

Q. They were Americans or British?

A. I would not know. They were not -- we were very scared. We did not look. We could maybe had seen some signs. But most likely they were either American or Great Britain's. So they dropped the bombs. And all at once sand and gravel fell on our heads. And the thought runs through my mind how it feels before you die. And from bomb, that was such a noise. After a few minutes, seems like some girls start to jump out of that wagons because they were uncovered. And I don't know how could I, I was always skinny and small and very weak, how I had the strength to jump over of them, because the wagons, coal wagons, they are still high, that I was able to jump over and fall down. And falling from those train, and where the railroad tracks are is much higher than right there next, there is so low, landing there. And I saw other

girls, women running. There was a woods not too far. And next to the railroad tracks were German people, some gardeners, and they had some fences. And men also were running. And we were trying to jump over, bending over the fences and falling on the other side of those gardens, and running into the woods where the big trees. And here we see behind those big trees German men or soldiers laying there with their rifles. And they holler at us: "You don't run. You lay down." We were afraid. We anyhow ran there. And I saw a few men were injured, blood was running. And I had with me in my hand the white babushka that we put on our heads, I had from a white material. So I gave to that one man, I said maybe you could bandage your injuries. So we ran in the woods. And for the run, it was a thick woods. And eventually we were a few of us together, girls. And somehow we came together with this Maria, that Polish sister, so we end up being together in the woods. And so we stayed overnight in that woods. It was cold. It was like 9th of April. We broke off the branches of some trees, Christmas trees, whatever they're called.

Q. Evergreens.

A. Evergreens. And we settled about seven of us with the back to each other and we spent the night. Next morning, we heard like shootings and some commands like of Germans, and we didn't know what's going on. We came more together and eventually, soldier or -- yeah, brought a few girls with him to us, where we were, and he commands us to go out of the woods. And these girls that were brought by him, they said oh, we saw what terrible things this soldier, he shot the man, the man that like we were, the prisoners, they were in the woods too, she says they shot them there in the woods. And they were so shaken up. We didn't see. So we were brought out on the edge of the big woods and gathered together. And there some of the policewomen that we were within our train, we had mostly policewomen. There were a few men, mostly women. And so now we have to go. And so they were guiding us to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. That's where our destination on the train. And these German policemen, they were so mean and things. And they said: "Well, you will see what's going on." Really, they were hollering for no reason. And they were making stronger girls to carry their hooks and their baggages. And Maria, she was stronger, so she had to carry for some distance. And it took us -- we stayed one more night in the woods. We were taken through the fields, it was in April, and we see on the highways many people are marching, walking. And so eventually they brought us in Bergen-Belsen. And they said you will see that you will die, you will not have as good as death. Of course, where we were 500 women in that camp in Salzgitter, we had better, we are not too many. We didn't have warm water but we had the cold water. And they would take us Saturday in the afternoon, since this camp was next to the woods, together the big woods, the trees were large, were not thick, so we could not run away, bring little bit woods and warm up some water on the stoves we had in our rooms, but they were not heated, only Saturday that we bring woods and some pans we put, warm up water and wash up ourselves. Now, in Bergen-Belsen, when we were brought there, we were brought in the barracks without any showers, nothing. And that barrack was occupied by people. There were beds and so on. So to make place for us, half of the barrack was emptied. Those beds were put in another half and they were close to each other, there was just small walking place between some. And those people were put there, there were bunk beds, two person in one. So they made

USHMM Archives RG-50.028*0005

17

half of that barrack available for us, 500 women of us. We had hardly the place to sit there. And this was the time that planes were flying all the time and we could hear the noise. And they had shutters outside on the windows, they were all closed up. We had dark day and night. There was no light at all. But even in daytime, it was sitting just inside, we were not permitted to go outside. And by that time, in Bergen-Belsen, they shut off water in all barracks, there was no water, except the kitchen barrack, where they were cooking food. Was no water to wash, no water for toilet. People were drinking water from the cemented troughs in the camp. But, well, at this time, we were not permitted to go out, we just sat there, they would give us something. And typhoid fever was there so badly, each morning when they will make us go out between probably 5:00 and 6:00 o'clock, still dark, we would stay there, they would drag out people who died. And we at night, when we tried to lay down, stretch out, oh, there was such a noise on each other. And if somebody wants to go out at night and step on the other people, there was so noise, and so bad.

Q. How did women treat one another in that camp?

A. Well, they were all, of course, perplexed, scared mostly. And they just -- they couldn't be expected kindness, but each one like tries to defend, have a little bit place for one's self and so on. And then soon after that, the Great Britain's occupied that part of Germany where Bergen-Belsen was. And so I don't remember which date it was, but all we knew, the German policewomen disappeared. So if they disappeared, that means we are free. So we start to go out of our barracks. And at this time the people had diarrhea, the typhoid fever, and there was no space to step out, outside between the barracks.

Q. Because it was all full of --

A. Oh, yeah, all full of people, yeah. They had --

Q. Who were sick?

A. Yeah, relieved themselves. And so Great Britain's, when they came, they start, of course, helping. They were cooking soup, potato soup, putting lots of meat from those cans, canned meat in there. And for people who are starving and sick, that food was not the best. Many people got more sick and more were dying. There were lots of the Jewish women too in that camp and they were very skinny because they were there I don't know how long. We were more fresh, we were young, we were in better -- under better conditions than they were. So when we were free now to walk outside, Maria said we will go every day and look in the camp, I know here must be Jehovah's Witnesses' sisters because each concentration camp lots of them has. And so we would go in daytime and walk and look for them. Now, one Sunday, it was nice sunny day and we were walking on the edge of that camp where there was a space and green grass was there and some trees. And from far away, we could see about 25 or 30 women were sitting. She said: "I wonder if that's not them sitting there, because the other prisoners have no reason to sit there." And so we were walking there. And when we come closer, they got up and start to walk and they start to sing the song. Maria says: "Oh, now I know for sure they are our

sisters because they sing this song, I know it. We will follow them. And we will see them where they go and we find out." So we start to follow them and didn't took too long, those sisters turn around, they said somebody follows us, so they start to talk to Maria. For me, I was stranger to this association. And so she said: "Yeah, she is Jehovah's Witness." And oh, so they called out: "Hey, come on here, this is one of our sisters." And they come and they hugged us and smiled. And I felt so strange because never in my life I experience that people who don't know each other, most of them are German, from Czechoslovakia, Austria, from Rumania, and gypsy, and one was a Jewish, Eva, Eva Busch, and they are so friendly. Oh, that was a miracle for me such people exist. Oh, how I would like to be like them. So they said you come with us, this is a time we'll get dinner now. And to each barrack from the kitchen would be brought in a big, whatever, vessels meal and we have to begin there to have a need. They said come first to our barrack, there are some of our sisters that are sick, not well, and you could stay with us. So we went to their barracks, they were there in a couple rooms. And so they were all together. They asked before German policemen that they are Jehovah's Witnesses, they want to be together. So they said well, okay, these two sisters, well, you could, the two, have this upstairs, one of the bunk beds, two of us, and two will be without it. And so some of sisters were sick typhoid fever, they didn't eat their -- it was a thick potato soup and big pieces of potatoes and meat, and big dish. So they gave us, we hadn't eaten. And now they said well, go and bring whatever you have, the belongings -- we had hardly any -- and come and you will stay with us. And one sister, she was from Poland but she was German, and she could talk German and Polish. Some of them were who could talk German and Polish, they were German from their origin but lived in Poland. She said would you take this dish and if you get your soup, you could bring it here. And then at evening time, they don't give soup no more, they give slice of bread and tea, and some of the sisters --

(Interruption in tape.)

Q. So then you wanted to be with these people?

A. Yeah. I was so glad to be with these people because they were so friendly among themselves and so helpful, and even to me as a stranger. And I wanted to learn to be like them. And so we came to be with them. We had the one bed for two of us. And we were so nice and friendly. And many of them were helping each other, those who were sick. And they knew they were sick on typhoid fever and there were no help yet given, so they were helping each other and they would get sick in turn. But they were really sacrificing themselves out of love for God and for their neighbors. And one of the sister, the Jehovah's Witness, died. She was in the next room living with others, there were more than just one room of them. And when she died, so they were saying to me, as to others, we have to go and carry out that sister. So we wrapped her in a blanket and we were carrying her outside and putting her there on the sidewalk. That's what was done with the people who die each morning, they would be taken out of barracks and put there till they would be gathered.

Q. And who would pick them up?

USHMM Archives RG-50.028*0005

19

A. By that time, that Great Britain's soldiers, they have their trucks and so on. I should mention that always is in my mind, when we were walking with Maria, looking where we find Jehovah's Witnesses, one time we came to the end of the camp and there were big piles, two piles, high and wide, dead people piled up. When they were dying, they were not taking them nowhere. And that Maria was kind of walking closer to them. I said: "Maria, we should not go that close to see them." I myself couldn't take looking at the dead people because they were skin, just their bones and skin and with open mouths. And she said: "Well, we go and we could see, we could see what is this world, this government did to people. This is not what God wants that should be done with the people, but what they did." So we walked a little bit up to them. And they were as high as maybe three feet high piles, and long piles of the dead people. That's what I saw. So never, of course, erase from my memory.

And then later on, when Great Britain's were there, they were bringing big trucks and those trucks that make the ditches, what is it called?

Q. Graves?

A. Yeah.

Q. Open graves?

A. Open graves. They were burying them 700 in one, 900 in one, and they were putting them later on just how many bodies is in there. And those of German policemen and women who did not run away from that camp, they were the ones who had to load and unload those dead bodies. The women would take by the hands the corpse and man by the feet and they have to lift up high on those trucks, they made the high trucks, to load them down and to sit on them while they were taken to those graves, and unload them again. And the people who were in the camp, they were so mean and vengeful on them because people were treated badly by many of them.

Q. So the prisoners turned on them?

A. The prisoners, they were taking stones and throwing at them and -- or even that (BRUK) was they called the vegetable that we used to have in soup, they would still throw at them. And at one instance, I didn't see but was known that one of those policemen, while they were riding on the top of those dead bodies, he jumped into a water, there was cemented out like little things into it. But they were badly treated by people. Of course Jehovah's Witnesses never avenged. One time we walked with Maria in a camp when they were Great Britain's gathering sick people and taking them. At the end of this concentration camp, not far, there was a police camp, it was a soldiers' camp, and there were some good buildings for officers. They were made into a hospital for these people. And so we were walking there with her and here we see one little boy, he might have been four or five years old, little child, dressed in one like man's shirt, standing there and crying. And he must have eaten cereal before, the cereal on his face, and on his -- and he stays and cries, of course, screaming. And we stopped there and we see this truck, these Great Britain soldiers came there, and there were officers, officers, and there were also German, these policemen who were gathering the dead people. So when they stopped there, this commander

USHMM Archives RG-50.028*0005

20

from Great Britain's army, he looked at that child and then he talked to this German policeman, used to be. Of course we couldn't understand in English, but pointing like why did you do that. And he hit him with his rifle on the other side. So that was a very unpleasant sight to see. So they took that child, the British soldier wrapped it in a blanket, and they took him to the hospital. Where his mother was, nobody knows. Maybe she didn't survive. So that was --

Q. So then you became officially one of Jehovah's Witnesses?

A. Then, while living with them, we were studying. They had one Bible, and they had, even during their German occupation, they still had smuggled in the camp some Watchtower and the Bibles. And when we saw them and we found them that they were sitting, that's when they had the Watchtower study, that Sunday. So they were on Watchtower and the Bible and that's what they had. So I had to learn language. The Polish sisters there among them, they had Polish Bible and then they had German Bible. So I was sitting many times with this one sister, Maria Braun. She would read the Bible, Polish, and I knew alphabet, German, I learned a little bit in school in Russia, German language. So she would read and I would look at her and I would ask her these words. Because some Russian words in pronouncing similar than Polish but alphabet is different. So I would ask her about these words and what that means signs over the letters. And so I want to learn Polish. And so I was learning Polish. I learned Polish language so that I could read and understand and talk. And then of course that summer from Bergen-Belsen, the German sisters, German Jehovah's Witnesses start to go home by walking, because transportation was not there. And Polish sisters and Polish Jehovah's Witnesses still remained longer. And by the fall time, the people were taken away from Bergen-Belsen to different camps in Germany where many other foreigners were there.

Q. A displaced persons camp?

A. Displaced, uh-huh. And that's where I was always with Maria. I wanted to go home to Russia so badly because I never want to be away from home. I never was away from my village and this is already three years being away from home. But because I learned from the Bible and there was no Bible or any literature, Bible literature in my language, I thought if I go home, I can't get Bible in Russia and I will forget what I learned and I don't want it to forget. Maybe if I stay longer in Germany, with the time I could get some literature Bible in Russian language, then I would go, and that's what I did. I didn't go, I stayed longer. And I learned more Polish language and I learned English language. And I was baptized as Jehovah's Witness in 1946. It was the first convention for me to attend. Jehovah's Witnesses in 1945 in Germany, they didn't have convention. But in '46, they started, and so --

Q. Was it a big convention?

A. No, it was not big convention. And I had the chance to be baptized. And I was thinking I don't understand much but I know I want to do what God's will is, I want to learn and I want to do. In fact, when we come to convention from one city on a big truck, sitting in back of that thing on a bench, is by the time we came there, the baptismal talk was over, was time to be

baptized. And I said how sorry I didn't hear it. But I wouldn't understand much, but I thought this is something that I would never want to miss it. But then I went being baptized anyhow. And from that time on, I was always associating with Jehovah's Witnesses in the camp where we were among ourselves, a few of us Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, and we tried to have our Bible reading study. And when we were in a camp, we were transported always from one camp to another, like they would liquidate one of the camp, so we would be in a bigger city like Delmenhorst, where we could attend the meetings with Jehovah's Witnesses in German language. And so I learned German language, I was able to talk fluently German language and go preaching to German people and --

Q. Is that how you met your husband, too, then, at that time?

A. Yeah. I met my husband in 1950, being in a camp with other foreigners, witnessing. And so the Bible teaching was such a strength in my life because it gave the hope for a future that as strong as I wanted to go back to Russia to my family, see my mother, I still appreciated that Bible is so needed. Because if I go and have no Bible with me, I will forget. I want to share with my family. And I won't be able for too long. And so I remained in Germany.

Q. Marta, do you have any pictures of your family or anything with you today?

A. I don't have of my family. In fact, I have a couple maybe from my three sisters, but I didn't bring them. I have just one picture of me when I was 16 years old and with my couple friends.

Q. And you and your husband got married in what year?

A. We got married in 1950.

Q. And how many children do you have?

A. We have three children.

Q. Any grandchildren?

A. Yeah. We have three grandchildren.

Q. And you enjoy them, I'm sure.

A. Yeah. We do enjoy the family, yeah.

Q. That's nice. So as you look back on your life, your life has been full of many experiences.

A. When I look back on my life, I appreciate so much that Jehovah God did help me. Because when my father died, at the age of four years old, when I grew older, I missed my father so much because I noticed my cousins had their fathers, how their fathers. And I was kind of

downhearted and the life was hard. And I was a person that would take deeply the bad things, it would have much impression on me. I was not a very happy person. So when I heard that from Bible, Bible's promise of God's kingdom, life eternal, that is something I longed for. That was something that I was looking for. And that's why I appreciate the Jehovah's Witnesses were the ones who were having that message. Because with all the strong belief and confidence in Bible, they displayed what I learned being associating with Evangelists and Baptists, that if you suffer as evildoer, you deserve. But if you suffer as Christian, doing God's will, this is pleasing to God. To me it was clear that these are Jehovah's Witnesses from all the countries, mostly women from Germany. Some of these women were 65 years old, in fifties and thirties and twenties, and they were there as German people in concentration camp for reason that they believe Bible and share with others. Then from Poland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and France, and then from Rumania and gypsy. And this Eva (BAUSCH), she was my age, she was from Hungary, she was Jewish. And she was sick that summer and her joints had that bad, whatever, arthritis wrong -- not what it's called, but she was so bad like many people. And she was taken -- Switzerland took sick people from concentration camp into their country to help them and they eventually could live there. And this Eva (BAUSCH), she wanted me to go with her. We were same age and she loved me so much. But I didn't understand German language at that time. And that Maria said: "Well, if you want to go, you could go." But, you see, you can't learn much from her, whereas from Maria, who talks Polish, Ukrainian and Russian, she could help me to tell me more from the Bible hope, and so --

Q. Okay, Marta. We want to thank you very much. In the beginning, did you spell your name out for us?

A. I did, I did.

Q. Okay. Very good. I just didn't remember.

A. Yeah.

Q. Well, we want to thank you very much on behalf of the Holocaust Museum for you sharing your experiences with us.

A. Well, I take it as a privilege. Because before, I couldn't talk for many years, I would choke with crying, all those clear pictures what I saw and went through those in concentration camp was very hard to relate, so -- but if people could know what went on, so this perhaps some people could benefit, as I did.

Q. Thank you very much.

A. You're welcome.