

-TITLE- Magdalena (Kusseron) Reuter
-I_DATE- July 18, 1991
-SOURCE- USHMM/JW
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND QUALITY- Poor to average sound; The speaker has a heavy German accent, and her English is stilted at times.
-IMAGE QUALITY- average; studio setting
-DURATION- 2 hours 47 minutes
-LANGUAGES- English
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES- This speaker's story is difficult to understand in some segments. Sometimes, the information that is given does not relate to previous information given or does not follow chronologically.
-CONTENTS-

Tape 1

1:06 Video introduction of Magdalena, her brother Paul Gerhardt (ph), and her two sisters playing a classical piece of music. A panoramic view of the house Magdalena now lives in is given.

1:09 Magdalena was born on January 23, 1924 in Buchom (ph), Germany to Franz and Hilda (Ischlaus (ph)) Kusseron. Hilda Kusseron was born in eastern Germany in Pozen (ph), now part of Poland. Magdalena's father was likewise born in eastern Germany in the province of Poman (ph), also now part of Poland. Her father served as an officer in the post office until W.W.I. During W.W.I, Franz served in the military for Germany until he was wounded, upon which he returned to his work with the post office.

1:12 Magdalena talks about her family, naming the six boys and five girls in her family. From oldest to youngest, they are Animi (ph), Wilhelm, Ziegfried, Karl (Karlheins (ph)), Reinhardt (ph), Hildagarde, Wolfgang, Magdalena (the speaker), Elizabeth, Answina (ph), and Paul Gerhardt (ph). Disillusioned with the war and with the idea that Christian could fight against Christian, Magdalena's father went

searching for a new religion. In 1924, both of Magdalena's parents were baptized into the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses.

- 1:15 Magdalena comments on the little she can remember of her life in Germany before Hitler's rise to power in 1933. In 1931, her father was asked by the society of Jehovah's Witnesses to move to Bitlepschpringer (ph). As there were no Witnesses living in Bitlepschpringer at the time, Magdalena's father was to provide literature on the Jehovah's Witnesses to the people of this village as well as the nearby village of Parabon (ph). Magdalena remembers how in 1931, men came to her new home and confiscated the literature that her father was to distribute.
- 1:18 Magdalena remembers that "brothers" would often come to stay with them. These people served as full time door-to-door preachers to the surrounding community. Her entire family took part in preaching the beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses to the community. She was about nine years old when the police first came to confiscate the books.
- 1:21 Magdalena recounts the arrest of her parents at around this same time. Both her mother and her father were arrested and taken to Parabon (ph), but her mother was allowed to return shortly thereafter to care for her children. Her father was detained for ten months, first at Parabon (ph) and then at several other prisons whose names Magdalena cannot remember. Magdalena and her family were allowed to visit her father occasionally for ten minutes at a time.
- 1:25 Magdalena states that the reason given by the police for her father's arrest was that he was responsible for the preaching world, as he had the addresses of many known Jehovah's Witnesses. In addition to preaching door-to-door, Magdalena's family took part in a worldwide letter writing campaign addressed to Hitler. These letters asked for the cessation of Hitler's persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses. While her parents were in jail, Magdalena and Hildagarde took over the job of distributing religious booklets to the community.
- 1:29 Magdalena speaks of her father's second arrest around 1937 in
which he was imprisoned for about two years. In October,

1940, he was allowed to return home for about three or four days to attend the funeral of his son Wilhelm. Magdalena recalls how Wilhelm was imprisoned for six months as a result of refusing to go to war. After six months of imprisonment, Wilhelm was killed. Magdalena's father returned to jail after the funeral in order to finish his sentence. When he was finally released, he continued to preach and baptize members of the community, including Magdalena herself.

- 1:32 When Magdalena was seventeen, the police came to arrest her mother, father, Hildegarde, and herself. However, at first the police said that Magdalena was too young and left her at home. A few days later, the police returned and arrested Magdalena as well. As no one was left in the house, the police locked the door and took the key.
- 1:36 Magdalena was actually relieved to be arrested and be taken to the same prison that her mother was in, although Magdalena did not see her. After two days, the Gestapo came for Magdalena and took her back to her house. There, they were met by five or six other policemen. They repeatedly asked her where the literature was hidden. When she kept answering that she didn't know, they accused her of lying and beat her. Finally, she was brought back to prison where she was reunited with her father, mother, and Hildegarde.
- 1:39 After being interrogated, the family was separated again within the same prison. Magdalena was sentenced to serve six months in a youth prison. Her mother was to serve two and a half years in another prison, and Hildegarde was sentenced to be moved to a third prison. However, after the judgements were handed down, the wife of the officer who had sentenced them took pity on Magdalena, her mother, and Hildegarde, and agreed to place them all together in the same cell.
- 1:42 Magdalena describes how she spent three to four weeks with her mother and sister in the same cell. She then regresses back to 1940, before the sentencing, and comments on the guards in the prison at Bitlepschpringer (ph). She then tells where various members of her family were in 1940. Reinhardt (ph) and Anima (ph) were together in Berlin. Karlheins was in prison, and the three youngest were in a children's home.

- 1:46 After the sentencing, Magdalena's mother spent two and a half years in a high security prison in Krifed (ph). Magdalena and her sister Hildegarde were taken to a youth prison in Fechter (ph) where they barely saw each other for six months. Near the end of her sentence, Magdalena was taken aside and told that if she signed papers from the Gestapo, she could go free tomorrow. These papers said that Magdalena would stop preaching the beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Refusing to sign, Magdalena was sent to Bilefed (ph) to the Gestapo, where again she was told to sign the papers or else enter a concentration camp. Again, she refused.
- 1:49 Since Magdalena was not yet eighteen, she was kept in the prison at Bilefed (ph) for four months before being considered old enough to enter the concentration camp. In prison, she was kept in a small cell with ten to thirteen other people. At night, for lack of room, they all slept on the floor. At some point during Magdalena's stay, she was reunited with a fellow Jehovah's Witness, Honey Whiteman (ph), who updated her with news of the Kusseron family. At this point, Magdalena's mother was still in prison at Krifed (ph), and Hildegarde was still at the prison for young people.
- 1:52 Out of her four month sentence, Magdalena spent two months in solitary confinement. She was made to get up at six every morning and occupied her time by remembering hymns from her faith and by developing sermons in her head for when she would be free to preach again. Near the end of her sentence, Magdalena was visited by a policewoman who told her that she would be free to return home within the week. This guard did not know that Magdalena was a Jehovah's Witness and that Magdalena would be entering a concentration camp upon her release.
- 1:54 Magdalena tells how she confided to this policewoman about her beliefs and her faith, commenting on how this policewoman took pity on her. In recalling how polite all of the guards were to her, Magdalena recalls that the overseer of this prison understood Magdalena's refusal to renounce her faith. In fact, it was this same woman who was responsible for calling Hildegarde and informing her that her brother Wilhelm had been killed.

- 1:57 When questioned about those who believe that the persecution of the Jews and Jehovah's Witnesses never took place, Magdalena recalls a man in Madrid who was German and a member of the SS. He was married to a Jehovah's Witness whom Magdalena knew. This man refused to believe that Magdalena had spent time in a concentration camp. After ten months of incarceration, at the age of eighteen, Magdalena was taken to the concentration camp of Robinsrook (ph). Here, she recalls seeing the transports of Jews arriving at all hours of the day and night. Although the Jews were taken to a different camp, Magdalena was aware that they were being taken there to be killed.
- 1:60 Magdalena was transported to the camp by train. The journey took ten days although they stopped every night and spent it at a prison where they would sleep and get a little to eat. Magdalena shared the train car with about six other women, prostitutes and criminals. Because of the harsh environment that they created, Magdalena was happy to arrive at the camp after sitting for days in a train car where all of the windows had been painted over. Upon arrival, the SS screamed for the prisoners to stop talking and step down from the train. While the other women cried, Magdalena felt relief at being able to leave those women.
- 1:63 After getting off the train, Magdalena was brought to the reception area where she was registered. Afterwards, she was taken to the bathroom and given a lice check. When she returned to the registrar (registat (ph)), she recognized a fellow Jehovah's Witness from her town who took her to her block. In her block, Magdalena met up with another Jehovah's Witness whom she knew, Gertrude Piltsenrein (ph), who showed Magdalena where her bunk was. In two days, Magdalena was summoned by the commandant and once again asked if she would not renounce her faith. After a half hour of refusing, she was allowed to return to her block.
- 1:65 Magdalena describes that those women found to have lice had their heads shaved. A shaven head was also a sign of a Polish woman or a woman who had some type of relationship with a Polish man, as Hitler did not condone Germans having relationships with Poles.

1:68 In the camps, Magdalena was forced to work from morning until night, rising at 4:00 A.M. each morning. Role call took place first. The women would stand outside in ten rows of ten women each, one block behind the other. Role call could last anywhere from one to five hours and was held outside regardless of the weather. After role, Magdalena went to work. Her work was in the camp garden where she worked alongside fellow Jehovah's Witnesses.

Tape 2

2:04 Magdalena would work until about 6 or 7:00 P.M. Then, they were allowed to return to the camp where they ate, cleaned, and went to bed. During her last year in the camp, Magdalena remembers the arrival of a truckload of Polish women. Since there was no room for these Polish women but they still had to be properly registered, they were forced to remain outside in the dead of winter. Many of these women sought refuge under a large Christmas tree that had been set up by the Germans at the entrance to the camp. While whole villages had been loaded onto these trucks, women, men, and children, many of the women brought to Magdalena's camp did not survive.

2:07 When visiting her sister Hildegarde in the infirmary, a large room with five to ten beds, Magdalena noticed that those women who were Polish or who had Polish friends were used for experimentation. Many of these sick women had cuts inflicted upon their legs. Some even had different types of powders applied to these cuts to see how the women would react.

2:09 Magdalena recalls that the Jews were kept in another camp with which her camp had little contact. She knew that the Jews also worked all day, but she also remembers the day when large trucks arrived at the Jewish concentration camp. These trucks were loaded with Jews and driven away. Magdalena never saw them again. She and her friends knew that the Jews had been killed although they didn't know how. During this time, Magdalena continued to believe in her faith and would even exchange Bible texts learned by heart with her fellow prisoners at role call, provided that the SS guards were not paying attention.

2:12 Magdalena was not joined in the camp by Hildegarde until Hildegarde's two year prison sentence was done. She finally arrived but was later transported to another camp. Magdalena's mother arrived after her two and a half year prison sentence. Her arrival coincided with Magdalena's recovery from a six week bout with polio. While hospitalized and waiting the arrival of her mother, Magdalena was helped by her friend, Louisa Yandof (ph). After the arrival of her mother, Magdalena spent much time with her, as their beds were next to one another.

2:15 Later on, Magdalena worked as a cook in the kindergarten that was provided for the children of single SS women. Her mother worked in the post office, distributing the incoming mail. Later, her mother was to work in a canteena outside the camp, preparing food for the workers. All of the women workers lived on one piece of bread a day, and Magdalena was told by her mother not to swallow the bread, but to keep it in her

mouth

a while to make it last longer. Many times, she saved her morning bread for the evening. As the entire block was Jehovah's Witnesses, there was no fighting among prisoners for this bread.

2:18 Sometime during her last year in the camp, Magdalena worked in the household of a high ranking German officer who lived close to the camp. One day, he gave her the key to the house and said that he and his family were going elsewhere but that they would return. From the action, Magdalena guessed that the Germans were in jeopardy of losing the war. She was left alone in the house for one or two days before the bombing started.

2:21 While she was staying at the officer's house, Magdalena's mother arrived. Knowing that they would be killed by the SS if her mother was found there without permission, Magdalena called the commandant and gained permission for her mother to stay there for the night. However, they both decided to return to the camp where they would be among friends. Upon returning, they found all the women lined up outside preparing to march. The SS, knowing that the end was near, was preparing to evacuate the camp entirely. Each woman was given a small packet of food, and the march began.

- 2:24 Along the way they were bombed, and several people were wounded. By the second or third day of marching, the bombing became so bad that Magdalena, her mother, and about twenty-five other women took refuge in a small woods at the side of the road. they spent a cold, wet night in these woods between the German and Russian army's crossfire. Everyone was silent though no one was sleeping. By morning, it was quiet.
- 2:28 When they emerged from their hiding place, Magdalena and the women saw that the SS had discarded their uniforms and fled. Everywhere were dead people, wounded people, and dead horses. Two Russian soldiers arrived and talked with one of the women who happened to be Russian. This woman tried to explain that they had been prisoners in a concentration camp, but the guards did not want to believe her. They told the women to go home. As this was impossible, the women went back to a small village they had passed through on their march. Here, there was confusion, with Russians drunk in the streets and the native villagers locked in their houses, afraid to come out. The women didn't know what to do.
- 2:31 Soon, Magdalena and the twenty-five other women were approached by a man who was a Swede as well as a fellow Jehovah's Witness. He was also a prisoner and worked on the farm of Dr. Karston (ph), one of Himmler's doctors. This man invited the women back to the farm, which was about a half hour walk from the village they were in. The walk to the farm took them past many rotting corpses. Upon arriving, they found twenty to thirty other brothers who worked on the farm. Here they stayed for six weeks, trying to figure out the necessary paperwork for returning home. When they did leave, they were not allowed to cross the Russian border. The Russian soldiers assigned them all to houses in the village they were in, promising that they would be summoned later. They were never summoned, and it took an additional six months, May to September, for them to reach Germany.
- 2:34 Finally, the women crossed the border secretly. When Magdalena and her mother reached their village, Louisa Yandof (ph) was still with them. They went first to the house of a friend of Louisa's where they were greeted by Emgat (ph), the daughter of another woman they were with. Emgat took

Magdalena by the hand and led her back to the Kusseron house. Here, Magdalena learned that her father was ill but that all of her remaining family members were there. Shortly thereafter, Magdalena's father went to retrieve his wife. Before Magdalena's and her mother's return, her father had feared them both to be dead.

2:37 When she was first reunited with all of her brothers and sisters, Magdalena didn't recognize them at first and even confused their names. The family didn't sleep for two nights, catching up on all the time for which they were separated. Shortly thereafter, Magdalena's father organized the family to go out preaching, and the family's work was resumed. When asked how she feels when called upon to remember the past, Magdalena says that while it is an emotional time to remember, she focuses more on the present and on the growing organization of Jehovah's Witnesses. She now lives in Spain where she is involved with missionary work within the community of Jehovah's Witnesses.

2:39 Magdalena now serves with her husband as a traveling overseer for the Jehovah's Witnesses. With her husband, she visits a different congregation each week and preaches with them. Since the war, she has spent four years in Togo (ph), Africa, two years in Luxembourg, and has spent the last eighteen years in Spain.