# United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

## Interview with Helen Waterford
## November 14, 1989
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## PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Helen Waterford, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on November 14, 1989 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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# HELEN WATERFORD
# November 14, 1989

Q: I would like to begin by asking you to tell me your full name.

A: Helen H. Waterford.

Q: What was your date of birth?

A: April 14th, 1909.

Q: And where were you born, Helen?

A: In Germany.

Q: Helen, tell me about your childhood? Can we talk about that for awhile?

A: Sure. My...I was born in a...in a smaller town across the river from Frankfurt on the Rhine. And when I was about 3 or 4 years old, my parents moved to Frankfurt. It was very unfortunate that, uh, my father was born in Lithuania and had difficulty to get permission to stay in Germany in Offenbach. I do not know why. I only know that we had to move to Frankfurt. 1914, the first World War started. I was 5 years old and the laws in Germany are still the same, that the wife and the offspring takes the, uh, well, is is the same citizen of a country as a father. So my mother, who was German...her family was there for centuries....and I, we became all of a sudden Russians because Lithuania belonged to Russia at the time. And as Russians, we were the enemies of Germany, and we would have been interned if we couldn't live with my grandparents who at this time came from a very small town in Germany...in Germany. They're quite old. We thought at that time old. And, uh, my aunt, my mother's sister, had taken them in into their building and so we shared their quarters. And we were not register...registered at the police which meant like living underground, illegally. All this naturally was not told to me. I was much too small to understand that, but I do know that when I was 6 years old, I was supposed to go to school, and it was not possible to go to a public school because my citizenship was Russian. And, uh, there was a Jewish school, an excellent Jewish school, liberal, and my mother talked to the director and he understood and let me come in without birth certificate or whatever. That was the school I started when I was 6. It was absolutely a fantastic school as I found out later in the years. And, um, it was so broad-minded and we learned so, so...everything so much, uh, so directly, so uh intensively. The school was in two buildings and were connected. One were girls and one were boys. And, uh, it did not happen before we were maybe 13 or 14 that we were brought together with the boys. Even some of them naturally one had already seen, and, eh, in between the hours, but boys and girls in the same class at the same age were taken by the teachers to outings, which I thought was a very good idea and everybody liked it. Uh, I was in this school until I was 18 years old. Because when I was 16 and I thought it was the end, they added the three classes that you could go in there if you wanted to go to the

university...you wanted to go on. That's what I did.

Q: Helen, what was it like growing up as a Jewish child?

A: I couldn't tell you, because I thought everybody was Jewish. In some way I was not aware that the children I was playing on the streets with were neighbors that they were not Jewish, because all the children I knew were Jewish. Frankfurt is a big city and, uh, was a big city at that time too. It...I was...I was thinking I was living in a Jewish world. We were not that very religious. We were liberals, as it was called in Germany. And my parents went to the high holidays to the synagogue. We didn't live far from synagogue and, uh, there was no Sunday school because most of the things we had in school. We had very little Hebrew lessons, but we did uh have the Rabbi teaching us the history of the Jews.

Q: I understand you were married in 1933?

A: Yes.

Q: Would you tell me about your husband and the circumstances of your marriage?

A: Oh, I... In 1933, I got married. I met...I met him the year before, but I, uh, I had..I had to work uh besides going to school, to finance it. There were no loans at this time, and my parents were not that happily financially to afford that. And I, it came out, I made very good money, so I was in a situation to support myself and help my parents. So I decided I wouldn't get married. Why should I get married? I saw no reasons. And, uh...I had a boyfriend because just everybody had to have a boyfriend. It was the, uh, style. But, uh, all of a sudden...I had known him from school as I said in this school where we were. The school's name is Philanthropin, if somebody would ever hear that. Phianthropin was unique and, um, it was a shame that it didn't never come back in any shape or form. Uh...I decided I didn't want to get married. After he did not want to get married to me, so I was jilted...and the sour grapes, were I don't get married. And I could travel, and I was traveling to, um, um, to the seashore. There was an island[1] where most of the people who came there in summer were Jewish because the next island did not allow Jews. So the Jews had their own places, and so that's where I went. And on the second day I was there, I met the man I married later.[2] I did not want even to talk to him because he thought...he looked as if he was 18 years old. I was 23 already. I was absolutely not interested, but he was very persistent and I found out that he was 28 so that made things a little easier. (laughs) And he came also from Frankfurt. So we got married after Hitler took power, which was in January 30th, 1933. He had lost already his job and we...but I still had my income, and we got married with the intention to leave the country. We were married by the way by the Orthodox Rabbi who married my parents and his parents. And, um, we left Germany in 1934 going to Holland.

[1] Norderney, one of the German Frisian islands in the North Sea.

[2] Siegfried Wohlfarth.

Q: What happened next?

A: Now, the trip to Holland...the preparations of leaving Germany at that time so very early was a little different than it became later. We could took take everything with us. And he had a job there. He was a CPA. He had gotten a job there. I couldn't work there - didn't get any permit, being not Dutch. And, uh, I tried to learn the language which is um not so easy. It is more of a throat thickness, it seemed to me, than a language. I got used to it because I wanted to speak it. I wanted to make friends, and I had nothing to do. I started without really, uh, thinking about - it a business. I . . .Now, at first I have to say I got pregnant, and we found out that we would have a very hard time to live on the salary he had and ...with a child you know. So I want...I had to think of something...how to make some money to make it easier. So I was helping the people who moved to Holland from Germany to settle down and I did everything they would need to uh find a place to live, to furnish the place, because they had...mostly couldn't bring much furniture anymore. I wanted to make it easier for them, and I wanted to make some money on it. Which I did. It developed later in a . . into..an interior decorator business and the people I had as customers before told it to other people, and it was very successful. But that was 37, that's when my daughter was born. Then, in 1938, came the uh the night of the broken glass, on November 9th, and, uh, my mother called from Frankfurt and told me that my father and my brother were arrested and uh, what we could do. Now my father had been arrested a few months before, and we got him a visa to come to Holland. It was very difficult, but when he had the visa he did decide not to go. He was convinced without any...he couldn't yet even say why...that uh it would be over soon, and there was no reason for him to leave Germany. So he stayed. My brother was 18 years old and, uh, he was arrested. And he came to Buchenwald. But when my father was arrested, the man who looked at his passport, the stateless one, and he saw he had a visa to come to Holland and he said to him, "You're an idiot that you stayed here. I'll take your passport. I'll meet you tomorrow morning on the train to Amsterdam." And this my mother told me that he was coming the next day. My brother and my brother-in-law, my husband's brother, we all got them out to Holland or to England, where we had relatives and we couldn't go. And the the invasion came to Holland, which was in May of 1940, my parents, all of them, all of this family, was already in the United States. And we had no chance! My father, as uh the man from, you know, from Russia, he uh could have...he could come into the United States on a visa from this part because at that time there was nobody using a visa to go to the United States. If they would have had to wait for a German visa, I mean German bek, they would have never made it because the United States did not give all the visas they legally were obliged and was as possible to give, but they only gave half or less. So...so I...this way my father, my mother, and my brother got into the United States.

Q: What did you do?

A: Where? What? What I did do at what time?

Q: When you were in Holland at that time.

A: No. I don't..I never got...I told you I was working as an interior decorator.

Q: Yes.

A: And that was over the moment Hitler came. Nothing doing. Hoping that we would get out, but which was not possible. So we, uh...we were waiting what the Nazis were doing. My husband had just lost his job right away, and our child was three years old when the Nazis came and was five years old when we got the order to um appear at the train station in Amsterdam at 1:30 at night to allow us to bring one suitcase a person and the key to the house. This was a . . .a strange order. We didn't understand what really would happen to us, and all our friends came and we gathered in the house and talked- "What shall we do?" All the same age. We were five couples. We all had come from Germany, and each of us had a little girl about the same age. From all those people, all those couples with each one child, the only one who came back...the only ones who were alive was one man, was my daughter and me. We lost them all. And, uh, we...my husband and I, we decided we go to the Jewish Council. I assume you are familiar with what the Jewish Council was in each city. So in Amsterdam was a very large Jewish Council and we bought our order and asked, "What is this? Where are we going? What does it mean?" And we were...we were not the only ones who came. Everybody was confused. And uh we were told that we were going to a family camp to work and that we should take our children. We hadn't asked about children, but they said, "Take your children because they will be taken care of while you work." We left this building and I decided to tell my husband that I am not for going on the July 15th to get that train. And we, being brought up in Germany, which is a little different than other countries um had a hard time to accept that. My husband said, "We cannot do that. This is an order, black and white. Who knows what they will do to us if we don't go?" I said, "Who knows what they do to us when we are going? We don't know. We don't know where we are going. And why? Because Jewish, but (cough) what other reason?" So we decided that my husband should get a surgery to give us some time. And he found a willing doctor to take out (cough, cough.) excuse me...to take out his appendix which was very healthy. So we got two weeks that he could recover and then we would be getting another order. In those two weeks I've heard that everybody who is working in any capacity for the Jewish Council would get a stamp and a paper that they are at this moment free of deport. . .deportation and so I got a job as a cook in an old people's home. I worked there from 7 in the morning. I cooked for everybody. There were 40 people there. And I...if...if . . they paid me five-something like five dollars a week it was a lot. Anyway, I worked there.. I worked there maybe six weeks. I. . .I really can't say. In the meantime, my husband had recovered and uh still we did need somebody at home that my daughter was not even 5 years old. Somebody had to be there since I was practically gone all the time, and, uh, the day I came...I came one morning and the doors were open, and the whole place was in a terrible condition and everybody was gone, and most of them were on stretchers. It was a weary feeling. The people were all financially in a very good shape. I don't know what was lying around or so or what they took. I run out of the house because I thought, "Maybe there's some of those guys left, and then they'll take me." And they were all gone. So then I was sure, it was not work we were

sent to when they take those old people. But we had no other way to go any place because we were not allowed to be on the street at night. We had to wear. . wear our star. We uh could not take public transportation. We had to walk wherever we were going in this big city. We, uh, had special hours of purchasing our food. Everything was very, very difficult so you had no telephone any more. You had no connection. You just...that's a feeling...so we stay home and they will probably pick us up. That's all we can do. In...

Q: Helen, would you like to take some water?

A: Ja. Maybe. (drinks water) Ja. Early October, 1942, a very close friend of ours, we knew him for many years and, was a neighbor and, was one of those couples. This was a man who lived through it. He came and he said...he was married to a school friend of mine. I got them together. It was wonderful. So he said that he had somebody who was helping them to live underground and their child would be in a different place if we would like to consider that. Naturally, we said...and though...and the next day this man came to us. His name was Joe Vis.[3] He is the...the Gentile who is named with all the others who were helping me in my book. It's really written for them. He [Jo] came and said that they were all blue collar workers and they belonged to uh a very liberal small church. They didn't have much money, but they wanted to help as much as they could and they said, "It is easier if you are not together with your child, because she cannot stay inside what you have to do. We do not know how long the war will be. We have a place for a child if you want to give her up. I would suggest you do." We certainly agreed, and a few days later he came back with a couple.[4] We did not know their name and we did not know where they were living. We found out after the war that this woman was his sister, but we didn't know. And they came Sunday afternoon and we walked together to the street car with my daughter and gave it to her...to them. And, uh, we...this man, Joe Vis, he had the days before already with his wife everyday picked up things for Doris, my daughter, toys, her bed, her doll house...was there waiting for her, and, uh, he said, "Maybe in a few weeks we will have something for you too. It's more difficult to get two people a home again." So...he...but he got it. About three or four weeks later he came and he had a place[5] and we, uh, he uh...we had two metal beds, so he took those two and brought it where we were going because the people had no beds for us. And some pillow cases and so on. But I have to say in 1941, one year before, my husband who was very far thinking had said, "You know, we should prepare our child that she's not depending on us. We don't know - maybe there will be a transport for children to the United States, which never happened because United States did not take the 20,000 children they want to send. Or to England. We should be uh less warm with her, that she will never miss us. No hugging, no kissing. But she should be...it should be easier for her not to miss us. And

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[3] Joe Vis and his wife, Agaat, were instrumental in aiding Helen and Sigfried.

[4] Dirk and Stien DeBoers.

[5] In Zaandam, an industrial town located just outside Amsterdam.

that's what we started, a year before. Also, another friend[6] took from our house things we thought maybe we should put away. He offered it. And we gave him all our books. It was the most important thing. And the typewriter. But also silver and clothes and bed sheets and shoes and all those things. We had no idea what he would do with it. We did not ask. And uh so when when we left the house and to go into this illegal place there was furniture and all that was there. And we very optimistic. We even paid the rent for this apartment until we found out that the Germans had emptied it completely, which was maybe eight months after that. And, uh, the, uh...this man who took all our things, we had a contract with him that he had bought our furniture and that he had paid us so much for the furniture that and he got a receipt from the Germans that they had taken out the furniture that belonged to him, and when the war was over, he got the money.[7] He'd give to us, because that wasn't a serious contract. It wasn't true. He hadn't bought it. But the furniture and everything was gone naturally. And, uh, we were living underground from October 1942 til August 1944 in different homes because people got very scared very often. Sometimes wanted us to leave the same day. Some places we were two or three months until they got so scared. The place where we were last [Haarlem] we were eleven months and we thought for sure this will bring us to the end because by that time the uh Allies already had invaded in France and things looked very good. Thinking in two, three weeks they must be in Holland and then in August...on August 26, 1944, the day that Paris was liberated by the Allies, that was the day we were arrested.

Q: What happened after your arrest, Helen?

A: The uh the people in whose house we lived...she was uh a woman with three teenage daughters. Her husband, as she said, had left...left her when the youngest one was born. She did not have much money, and, uh, the girls were very nice. She was okay. She...she prepared our dinner and...cause this is something very important...how one lives. Two people alone in a room for such a long time. She prepared our dinner, and we had the, uh, coupons that she could buy food because without the coupons you couldn't live. Our friends from this church came every second Saturday and brought us coupons. The coupons were stolen every month in the distribution centers by another person. All around Holland for the 20,000 people in Holland who were hiding. When the war was over, it was only 10,000. The others were found. And uh they brought us everything we wanted. Any book and we just had to write it down and they tried to get us the books and they brought it. And they told us also what, how the war was going because we were cut off from the world because they were listening to the BBC. If you are caught to listen to the BBC in London, you were executed.

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[6] Ab Reusink.

[7] Two years and several months later, when a special department of the occupational forces arrived, Ab Reusink protested that Helen and Seigfried's furniture were his belongings. Reusink produced the three-year-old contract that he had drawn up originally. Thus, the Germans paid Reusink the amount of the contract, which he then turned over to Helen and Seigfried.

They did it, and they told us what was going to happen. What was going on and how well we were doing, we heard it from them. They also told us in July of 1944, that there were six extermination camps only in Poland. Only. And there was one...it was the largest one. It was Auschwitz. And by that time two million Jews already had been gassed. They were telling that and, uh, it was very upsetting naturally. And everybody was hopeful, very, very hopeful that the end was coming. So on this day when we were arrested, we were brought to the Gestapo. Oh, I have to say when those men came- there were four men- two Germans and two Dutch, and two of them were downstairs at the front and back door, and two of them came up to our room. They knocked on the door, they were very well mannered, and they said that we were arrested. They looked at the little belongings we had. They saw a picture of our daughter on the wall, because our friends brought us always picture to show what she was looking because she had gone to...going to school and then she was very happy where she was. And she looked happy. Uh, the one man said, "If this is your child, and if you have more children in hiding, we recommend that you take them with you because you are going into a family camp." Here it comes back, the same what the Jewish Council had said. And you will be...they will be taken care of while you are working. And my husband and I, we didn't even have to look at each other, we didn't answer that. Then, they announ...the other man said, "Why don't you take some warm clothes with you. Where you are going it is very cold." That was true. But we decided that we would take nothing. We went completely without luggage, knowing that we probably would come to Auschwitz because this was in some way called a punishment that we did not follow the first time...that we had to be punished for that, so it could only have been Auschwitz. And, uh, the, uh, the, uh...one, one and half day interrogation by the Gestapo was mostly about giving the names of the people who brought us those cards, because they had no idea who was breaking in and getting those tickets, and it must have been a very large circle.

Q: We have to stop for one minute.

A: Sure.

Q: We are having some difficulties.

A: How do you know?

[some technical conversation]

Q: ...because they did not come through . . .

A: I know. I know. A lot of things didn't come through . . .

Q: Okay.

A: I wish I had. . .

Q: Helen, I would like to go back. We're back on camera. You are at the point of being arrested, but as you are standing there, I find that there are a lot of questions. Uh, one of which is about your daughter. You're at the point of being sent away, . . .

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: Okay. We are on camera. You're at the point of being arrested and there must have been a lot of things going through your mind, one of which was perhaps most important, your daughter. Tell me what you knew about her at this point and where she was?

A: What I knew about my daughter was this friend, Jo Vis, who was the original helper and he didn't live too far from there. He was very often there to look himself at children. But, uh, in..at that time before...oh, maybe a year before we were arrested, Jo Vis had in his house always people until he found for them another place. So one day there was a man staying with them who had been on the black list because he was in the war in Spain. And uh he was on the black list and he was hiding there waiting for a better place, and they were all arrested. He and his wife and there were two friends of ours who came through us to him were there. They all got arrested. His wife was pregnant at the time. They let her go home to three children. Uh . .. Everybody else was, uh, sent out. He went to Dachau. He went...he lived through the war. He happened to become a cook and he came home very well looking. (laugh) So, uh...but the two women were deported to Bergen-Belsen. And this was the next man in line, his name was Rinus,[8] a wonderful man. Um, he was a gardener of the town, but he was very, very well-informed about everything. He was self taught man. And he brought all the books my husband wrote down he wanted, because my husband was writing how the world should be after the war. And in every way, in financial, in religious, in ethical, in any kind of way how the world should be. So he got the books he wanted every time when Rinus came. And, uh, he also visited where my daughter was, because this is the district where all the people who helped us were living, and he told us how happy she was, how wonderful she was doing in school. She was well. There was really no reason to worry about her. The...the woman...her foster mother, or whatever you would call it, was sick...I think for three weeks in the hospital. Another couple took over and took her in. They told us that afterwards. But she was in the best of hands. And though I didn't worry about her. Since we did not see her. We didn't...we didn't know ourselves where she was. It would have been very easy to get to her through all the others, but we never said, we never gave a name about the people who were visiting us. We just didn't answer.

Q: So when they came to take you, this was running through your mind. You knew your daughter was safe. Um, what what, uh...where did you go at that point? They took you and where did they take you?

A: To the..head..headquarters of the Gestapo in Amsterdam. We were in Haarlem. And

[8] Rinus Hille, a man who had been very active in efforts to save the Jews.

everybody said, "such a beautiful city." And I said, "I've never seen it." They took us to..to Amsterdam, to the headquarters, and, uh, questioned separate, always. Questioned and questioned and questioned. Sometimes they got very impatient. They did not hit us. They did not touch us. They were very angry. It's very difficult to fight against somebody who doesn't react. It's very difficult, and, uh...in some way, we had uh given up that... that we would ever be living. In some way, we were already on the way to die. And we accepted that this is it. There was nothing you can do, and we didn't want to get anybody else in. We had no interest.

Q: Did they ask you about connections to the underground?

A: Yes, that's that's what they wanted. That's the people who brought there, the people who visited, maybe... We didn't even answer. There was nothing there which would have shown that we were in any contact, but on the wall there was a map of Europe and what we heard from them where the uh Allies were, we put pins. That was there. But I think those guys were so ignorant that we didn't even see that. We were never asked, "How do you know?" Because it was not in the paper, but you got it from, from London. Never asked. Uh, uh. Coming...ja...in this house was also a lady living...a seamstress[9] with her mother, older mother, and this was a spinster who was making dresses. And I got very close to her. She lived, she and her mother lived on the second floor and I sat down very often- we talked. She was about my age and I still correspond with her. So when we left going down the steps, she was at the steps and I had in my hand a coral pin I had gotten from my mother-in-law. I had a very wonderful relationship to my mother-in-law...very. And, uh, I put it in her hands when I said goodbye, and, uh, that was that. We never saw the woman, her so called hostess or her three daughters. Nobody was there. And, uh, they brought us . . .after this time at the headquarters, they brought us for two days to the Amsterdam jail which was very nice. I would have always liked to (laugh) stay there and wait for the end of the war. It was clean and, uh, it was very nice. But there were only two days and then they brought us, always in the night, in street cars to the station and we were brought to Westerbork which was the transit camp in Holland.

Q: Ya. Hold it a minute. What I'd like you to do...Can you describe the trip to Westerbork for me please? How did they take you and who went with you?

A: I've never thought about that any more. I've never thought..that . .they were German soldiers. It was a regular train. It was a regular train and German soldiers. We had no luggage. There was no problem with us. We didn't talk. That's all. It's very...uh. . There was a big surprise to me when we came to Westerbork, about seeing all those people...so many friends we hadn't seen in years. They were there. And the green uniforms. Especially some women in those uniform. They looked chic, sexy. I...I didn't know...I said, "Who is that?" (laughs) They were all prisoners and they had some kind of work to do. I don't know...I was not long enough in

[9] Gre Orlessen.

Westerbork to find out how really those relations were. I have read some books afterwards about Westerbork, and, uh..

Q: But for you? What was Westerbork like for you?

A: It was a foreign world. Completely! The people who had been there for years, they took for granted that this was the right thing, where they would be. And as I said, we met good friends. We met a man there who lived...who had rented a room at the Frank's house, at their apartment, and we knew him very well because we introduced him to the one daughter of friends of ours and they got married. Now his wife was at that time when Jo Vis was arrested...was there. They had no place for her, and so she came to Bergen-Belsen. Where he went, I don't know, because the train where we...were leaving was about two days later and was the last train to Auschwitz because then the strike came in Holland. The announcement that the uh Allies would come to Holland, and the Germans knew that too, and they emptied Westerbork. There were only 300 people left . . .I didn't want- wish to be there to fight out who would be the 300. And, uh, our. . .our train...our cattle train went to Auschwitz. We were sure...we didn't know when we were came there that it was Auschwitz but in our mind since we had heard that this camp existed, that we were punished...punished for our hiding and whatever, that that was the place where we were going.

Q: What was the transport like? What was the trip like to Auschwitz?

A: A nightmare. A real nightmare. Um, the train was overloaded with people, and, uh, we were, I would judge maybe a hundred and fifty people. There was no room to sit. We had to stand. I don't know how it was in others because I..I always didn't want to talk to people and ask in camp how was it. We...uh...we were standing and, uh, a lot of people died...old people...babies. No water. No food. No light. No air. And no toilet facilities. And next to me was a woman who had a little child with her, a little girl, and she uh told me that the people who came to arrest them from in the hiding places said the same thing with the same words as the Jewish Council said...as those guys said who arrested us, "Take your children with you." And she did. So I thought maybe I did something wrong. Maybe I did not really believe that there maybe would be a chance to have the child with you. So they took us...was a three and a half day trip, and, uh, (long pause) twice the car stopped and the soldiers came in and they took our watches one time, and then they wanted our money telling us that the money wasn't worth anything. Where we were going we should give our money, and my husband decided...we had our money in belt, money belt. We had that on, it on all those years. And he didn't give anything. So when they closed again, we started to rip up this money...thousands of guilders. Wasn't easy to do. It's a physical step, also to rip it in little pieces. But we did. I don't know- it was stupid probably, but we did it. And, uh, we arrived in the middle of the night, the fourth night and was...you know, bright lights, and the doors opened, and the blue and white striped prisoners which were the prisoners from Kanada which we did not know Kanada existed. They looked very clean, starched uniforms. They'd never answer any questions. We said, "Where are we?" No questions. Just getting the luggage out. And all the people had brought with them, half households. It was all gone and

people, I'm sure it was at every train the same were very upset, and they always got promised, "We bring it to you where you are. We know where you will be." And, uh, at least we didn't have to go through that. The woman and the child and I were together when we started to move in rows after we were separated from the men. And we walked...the ramp was endless. I don't know how long, how many cars there were, but it seemed endless and there was the man standing who made the decision who shall live or who shall die, but we did not know that. He looked at the three of us and he asked me if that was my child, and I said no, and he made the movement with the thumb for one side to go for me and to the other side for this woman and her child, and I assumed that she had that privilege because they were taking care of the children. And, uh, this man was very good looking. I have never forgotten the look of Dr. Mengele because I found out the next day it was Mengele. There were more doctors than Mengele to do that since it was 24 hours going, train after train. But this was Mengele, and, uh, he was very good looking, and, uh, his uniform and his boots. He was just a perfect specimen of a man. And, uh, somebody had said, you know, when...a few months..few years ago when there was so much about Mengele, "Would you recognize him?" I said, "No, I'm sure not." The way he looked then at his height and, how can you? So he to the aside, he sent me, it was the side of life, and the other was the side of death, as I heard the next day also. And, uh, there were no Jewish children in Auschwitz, just a few Dr. Mengele wanted. Otherwise, there were no Jewish children. And the mothers were killed with them when they had the mother. Uh, I have met...before I forget that and I come to it, I met a woman who was with us in the barrack. A young woman. A very beautiful looking woman. She was very depressed. And after..I had very . .I had hardly any contact with her. All of a sudden she said to me, "You know what I did? I knew they would kill the children, and I let my children go," and uh she said, "I couldn't help him them because I would be killed too." She knew all that. She said, "I heard it maybe two days before I was on the train and I let my children go." I don't know what happened to her. I don't know how she lived through it. I wish she would be living and that she could have children again. I don't know. But that...went with me for many, many years. How do you live with that? The, uh, the side where we were, we were told to wait, and then came my husband who was also sent to this good side, and we talked for a long time until the women were called into a large, a very large room. And I must say when we were walking to this place in the woods I heard voices. I heard women speak. I heard dogs and I heard music. And I said to the other women I said, "I thought we would come to Auschwitz where they kill everybody. This is life. We are coming into life. You hear the noises? You don't have to worry." So, uh, we were called into that room and we got first our tatoo, and the girls who gave that were sitting at a long table on a wall and they all were wearing black satin dresses. Not the same dress, but the same material, and their hair was beautiful, long. Young women, very, very attractive women. And they had a book, and they put our name in and then they gave our tatoo and then we were with them going into a circle of soldiers with big dogs and then we had to take off our clothes, strip. The one who stripped me, helped me stripping, took at the same time my wedding band off my finger. I had forgotten I had it. Maybe I would have tried to put it in my mouth or whatever. I didn't know. So she took it and, uh, I still thought they were Germans. I did not understand that they were Jewish prisoners. So they helped us and they found out...tried to find if we had jewelry hidden some other places and, uh, they shaved us,

our head hair and our body hair. They left our shoes because that day no wooden shoes had come. I heard, um, Anne Frank's mother who was with us. And I knew the Franks. And I did not know that they had been arrested shortly before us, so I didn't know that. So I heard her discussing with one of those women...the woman..and she was with one daughter...no...she was with two daughters. There she was with two daughters... And ,uh, the woman said she should give her her shoes, and...and Mrs. Frank hesitated, and the girl said, "I bring you every day soup for your two daughters if you give me your shoes and I give you mine." And she was very naive and she did this. She never got a drop of soup. The woman who was handling me also said that...that must have been before or the same time...I don't know anymore. She said, "You have good shoes on." I said, "Yes, I am very glad I have good shoes on." She said, "Would you like to change with me?" I said, "No." That's it. And then we came under the cold shower and then we were outside the house and we got a dress, uh a . .dress. It could have been chiffon or it could have been wool. It could have been a size 10 or it could have been a size 25. It made no difference. I got a dress and we went to the barrack for the night. That was all happening in the morning when we arrived during the night..all that took the to the other night. We still didn't get to eat. We still couldn't go to the latrine. In the meantime it was a latrine. And we were, uh brought to the barrack and we were exhausted. Absolutely exhausted. And I had a dream which was with me for many years and, uh, I dreamt that I was coming home and I was telling my family and my friends the strange things that had happened to me this day, this weeks, I don't know anymore. Probably the most upsetting was this being changed into a different person with losing your hair, losing everything you had, just as you are born. I think that was the greatest shock. You couldn't see yourself, but you saw the others, so you knew what you were looking like. I think it was the greatest shock for all of us, because nobody menstruated anymore. That was over. And our young girls, we had a lot of young girls, we had the whole uh orphanage of Jewish girls from Paris, girls of 15 years old, and they came from Morocco, and they were brought to Paris, and they were all taken, and we had them all. Beautiful girls. Fifteen years old. All they could speak was their own language. They had nothing else. They couldn't talk to anybody else. They were very upset when they were not menstruating. Everybody very young was uh concerned, but then it was a blessing. What would we have done? We had nothing. We had no underwear. We had nothing.

Q: Can we ..we need to hold it for a minute.

A: Sure.

Q: We need to change tapes. Bonnie, let's break here.

End of Tape #1

**TAPE #2**

Q: Okay. We're back. We're back at the camp . . .

A: Ja.

Q: And you're describing just the loss of menstruation . . .

A: Ja, and the dream. The dream that I came home and are telling my experiences- with the tatoo, and with the losing the hair, and uh losing everything we had and everybody said, "This is impossible. You are dreaming, just a heavy dream-- that cannot happen to anybody." The strange thing is, I read many years later the book Night and he talks about people who came back and the people said he must have lost his mind. That was years later and so I'm not the only one who had such dreams. I think there are more people who have dreams on this kind, but I didn't have a...for a certain time and then it was over, that dream. Um...

Q: You're in the barrack . . .

A: Yes, I am in the barrack. We had 10 or 12 people in a bunk, and it was in the middle of the night when we came, so it was very short time that we could sleep. When the morning came and the first day in Auschwitz started, was a roll call. Roll call in Auschwitz I'm sure that everybody had about the same experience...that's uh the barrack elder was counting everybody, we were standing with five in...and I always, always...I don't know why... tried to stand exactly in the middle. Not in front, not in the back, and not on the side. I wanted to be little and short and not being seen. I don't know why. Later on, I found that the women who were tall were always picked to special things. They were not always good. So I didn't want to be picked for anything. I didn't want to be there. So, uh, we were counted but every roll call, every roll call was wrong. It never came out that we were as many people as they had had on their books. And the women got very...those women, those barrack elder, were very upset about it. They were also very beautiful dressed, with black dresses. Uh, I still didn't know that they were prison, Jewish prisoners. It didn't dawn on me that they would be prisoners. Look at us and look at them. And, uh, then came the SS men to check it, and that didn't work out. So he was very angry, and they were worried and they looked through the barrack and they found people who were hiding under the mattresses and they were found people who had died, and though they put them all there on the floor and counted them, and I think then maybe they were then, uh, accepting the numbers. I don't know. Even they mostly spoke German and I tried always to understand what they were saying, it was difficult. When this roll call was over, then volunteers had to go to the kitchen to get the coffee. And it was in big barrels and you had to carry them with uh sticks, and uh I felt so strong and so healthy, I always volunteered. I don't know why. I guess I was curious to see what the kitchen looked like. I think that was it. You didn't see much because you never had...got into the kitchen and most of the people who worked in the kitchen were born in Poland and spoke Polish and, uh, for long times before all that happened, there was always uh, uh, another world in between the Germans and the Eastern Jews and that was in Auschwitz also. Maybe even stronger, that

didn't dawn on me first either. Eh . . . Maybe stronger because there were so many Polish women who had been there or some other camp and ghettos for a long time already. This was '44. They started in 39. So, uh, they had so called jobs, and when somebody came, new in, who had been hiding or so, they always had a job for them. Always. They got...we never saw them again. They got help. We didn't...I didn't...I didn't know anybody. I came with a Dutch group, and I was considered to be Dutch because I spoke Dutch with them. The Dutch women were uh very unfortunate because they could never adjust, practically. They, uh, died like the flies, especially in Auschwitz. And, uh, I didn't understand that. I met the Hungarian women who had come a few months before us. Very intelligent, very...also attractive women. They were at that...in this camp I was...it was uh, Birkenau B-2, uh, they were the keepers of the latrines, and the washrooms, and I uh washing...I don't know for some reason I thought I just have to wash every day and they were not always open, but I got friendly with them and I could come in. Now washing is a big work because we had high, uh, uh, wash stands on high heels and you had to climb in there and then there was come cold water. That was all. And then you put your dress on again. But it gave me a very good feeling that I had done that. I felt...I felt I needed that. And, uh, the Dutch women said to me, "You are crazy. The next thing is you get pneumonia. How can you go under that cold water? You get pneumonia." I said, "Maybe there is some loose dirt because it's already you know some...a whole day, but whatever there is, I feel good." They didn't go. It was not very comfortable climbing, but also the friendship I had with the...with the women from Hungary helped me to get in and have some time to talk to them. The same with uh the latrine was closed at many hours. I could always get in. And, uh, we...we became good friends. They were much younger than I was.

Q: What did you do on a day to day basis?

A: In. . .in Auschwitz?

Q: Uh huh.

A: Nothing regular. Nothing regular. We were going sometimes with carts, with two wheel carts to . . into the woods and cut out some grass, squares, and brought them to a place where the soldiers were living and then they put that cut grass. We, uh, moved sometimes bricks on those things back and forth from one corner to the other- the it was not regular, and, uh, I do remember that we...when we were carrying those bricks back and forth... Oh no, that was . . . .that was later. That was not in Auschwitz. That was in the camp I was.

Q: Stay with Auschwitz for a minute.

A: Ja. You know it came to me that we had those carts there too. That's how it brought it together. No, we didn't, uh, we didn't have regular things to do. We went to the station sometimes and moved stones. Nothing special. We had two more selections with Dr. Mengele, only that was in the barrack. Many times during the day, there was all of a sudden a signal that everybody had to go back to the barrack, close the door, couldn't be out. So we

found out that this was the day when one of the doctors came because one day we had it. We were going out, but with us it, it was Mengele again and we took off our dress and in the nude we marched in front of him and he makes the same signs, to the right or to the left. In that case there was in the uh barrack a small room where the ones who were to be killed were settled and we could go. But by that time we knew what it meant because I had met a man walking through the camp. I walked around a lot to look. I was always a curious person. I wanted to see what's going on here. And I saw a man, the only man I saw in the camp, and he was Polish also. He had a triangle. And he was a criminal as I found out later, a black triangle, and, uh, I asked him. I spoke German, I tried Dutch. He spoke Polish. We talked together. And, uh, I asked him where we were. And he said, "You are not in Auschwitz. You're in Birkenau." And Birkenau, he said, "You see that chimney there, its smoking. Don't ever think that you come out alive here. This is the way we are going to heaven, through the chimney. And that little house next to it is where the gas is." It was a few days there-- very short time. And, uh, I was always wondering what is this man walk around in this camp? The books I have read, the many, many books of people who had been in Auschwitz...I assume now that this man was looking for a woman...because we had women who uh had some boy-friends coming into and bring...bringing them gifts, food, clothes. I don't know what. But I do remember that very much.

Q: Who could they have boy friends? Where did the boy friends come from?

A: From the other camp. From a work camp. Those were people who were already in camp for years. They were maybe kapos. I don't know. They could go. Whatever they were. They were not Jewish, but uh they looked for, you know, for the . . .the new women because they were still nice and, uh, we had one woman from, who was from Berlin. She was a prostitute. She had told me when we were in jail. She had told me that she was a prostitute. And that she's Jewish, and, uh, I never saw her there anyway. But there were women who were ready for whatever they could get to be with men where and how I don't know. But this came...not at that moment...I was thinking of that, of that guy who was there. He was clean dressed, well-dressed, and good boots which was the most important thing.

Q: Can you take it...I'd like to go back to a minute to the Mengele selection in the barrack.

A: Ja. Outside.

Q: Uh, he...was this outside or inside?

A: No. Outside.

Q: Outside? He took all of you outside?

A: We were all outside. Yes. And we walked by.

Q: Uh, did you see what happened to the women he chose?

A: No. I only know that they had to go into the barrack to the a little side room. Maybe it was a room where the elder was sleeping. You know she had a separate room. It could be. I don't know. What..ja, that was the second time. There were a mother and a daughter with us. The daughter was 15. You know, you...when you are under 16, you should have gone to the other side...so she was 15, and the mother was taken. So this girl was with us to the end. And everybody was trying to replace the mother. It was a Dutch girl, but I don't know what happened to her.

Q: There was, you said, a third selection.

A: A third selection started in the same way, with Mengele also. And then..there he...they counted 300 women. And to me it was clear that this would go to work.

Q: This was to where?

A: To work. That meant...and because we had no other job. It was already two months that we had no..nothing to do, just wait from one meal to another. And it wasn't bad, the food there in Auschwitz. It wasn't enough, but it was not bad. Ja. The bread was excellent. They baked very good bread, and, uh, ja...the . . .the bread soldiers get. Brown, blackish bread. Very good. It was never enough, naturally. And there was always something under that big piece of bread. It, uh, was a wedge. And there was uh on there uh sometimes cottage cheese, sometimes uh some uh jelly, marmalade, a piece of sausage. Not all together. That was one meal, and uh we got that so-called coffee which only looked like a black mess, and, uh, then the second meal we go, probably ja, mostly soup. But we had nothing to eat with so we had to share a bowl of soup with, with four people. And, uh,

Q: The third selection then . .

A: Ja. We were counted 300 people, and as I said, I assumed we're going to work. Mrs. Frank was in those 300 with Anna, but her daughter...was other daughter[10] was not there. She was in quarantine. She had some skin eruptions. Germans were very much afraid of skin get contagious or so. So she was in quarantine and Mrs. Frank said, "I'm not going with you wherever you're going if you're going uh because I wait until Margot comes back." That's what she did. She disappeared during the night...went into another barrack and, uh, came to Bergen-Bel. She didn't come...she died before she came to Bergen-Belsen.

Q: Can you tell me? This seems as good a time as any to tell us a little about Mrs. Frank and Anna. What were they like as people?

A: Now uh, I knew them before and, uh, uh, Mr. Frank was a typical German officer in his

[10] Margot Frank.

stand. A very correct, very bright man. Had an excellent relationship with Anna. She had a much better relationship with him than with her mother. And, uh, Anna was a very quiet girl...liked to write as everybody knows and, uh, Mrs. Frank was, as she did the dealing with her shoes, which is, you know, a small thing, when we came that she...that she changed the shoes. It showed in some way that it was very difficult for her to see the real place where we were. The reality, what, what could happen, what, what is happening. And, uh, Margaret was a very attractive girl. More attractive than Anne. But Anne was a lovely girl but she never talked much. They were...he was a very successful businessman, and everybody liked him. I don't know why he took all those people into that house, which was really too much. Made it very difficult, because to be even with two in one room hiding is a great stress. To be with the same person with your husband or with your wife for two years in one room is great stress and many marriages broke up afterwards. Uh, the 300 women were in another barrack and the next morning we were brought to the original Auschwitz camp which we hadn't seen, and we got some food for the day and we were in another cattle train. That was the 28th of October. My daughter was 7 years old that day. It was a gorgeous day. The leaves they were all changing. We were going west, what I thought was just the most wonderful thing. Could only be good, and, uh, the doors were kept open while we were going and we came to Czechoslovakia. They didn't tell us it was Czechoslovakia. It was high up in mountains...was nice, and, uh, it was a good feeling to be away from those killing places and from the chimney. It felt good. The commandant of this camp...the place was Kratzau. Kratzau was a factory...had a factory which originally came from Berlin. Hard, hard to find out those things because nobody told you really. A Berlin factory probably...was probably all destroyed. They came and took over this factory, which was originally a linen or something. So they made...they had all electric benches, and we got boxes of little cylinders, maybe three or four inches long, and maybe an inch hollow, light material, and we had to put the knife of the machine inside the opening. That means we did not do it, but the foreman did it. The foreman turned on the machine and we changed constantly when that shaved inside made the opening a little bigger. That was a factory. She said we have a very good factory here and she addressed us as girls, "Hi, girls."

Q: Who is she?

A: The commandant.

Q: The commandant.

A: The commandant with a white sweater and a turtle neck. She looked cute. She was about 22 years old, and uh she called us girls and she said, "You will have a good life here. You work hard, we treat you well." It's in the factory where you are living, not in the same factory, but about 15 minutes to walk, and we clean it all up and we are 300 women in each room. So 1200...we were the last 300....1200 women. Sounded very nice. And, uh, but we changed commandant. It was always a change. Always another woman came. All women. Our caretakers were four soldiers and four women, SS women, young, who were very unhappy that they were in this kind of a village where there was nothing. There was absolutely

nothing to do, and the winter was very harsh, very cold, lots of snow and ice, and uh the places where they were sleeping were very primitive. Not much more than we had. They had the same bunks, and, uh, the same toilet. Uh, we were not allowed to use that toilet, but we did anyway. Outside, between the stairs, like in old European places, there was a toilet in between the stairs, the in between the first and second floor in a corner. That was like that. That was their toilet. I don't know if they had a bathroom. But they built a shower, a large shower when we came there. They started to build it. We were never allowed to use it. Never. And, uh, we had no water. We had uh a little sink in the hallway which dribbled. We had no water. We could never wash ourselves, and after a very short time we were full of lice. Then they...they deloused us, which took a whole day to get deloused. They deloused us in Auschwitz already, and the lice came back after a few hours. And they had big drums where they put our clothes in and we got hot water to wash ourselves in Auschwitz. Didn't kill the uh (pause) didn't kill the...we, uh. ..the factory was working 12 hours from 6 to 6, and we could choose, have a choice of day or night shift, and I selected night shift because they said we would get on Sunday an extra portion of food. That was very important. Food is still important to me. So it was very important to take the night shift. So the day shift went, and when the day shift came home, the other ones were already on their way there, but, um as I said, the winter was bad. We had no heat in our rooms. We lost all our blankets. A lot of women made underwear from the blankets which when we found that out, we were just besides ourselves, because there were no blankets anymore. And, uh, the International Red Cross came. A great surprise. Somebody...you know...there are a lot of rumors in those places. Somebody said they...a cattle car came with boxes in there, and came from Switzerland and we thought that's ridiculous. But a few days later, we got each a handful of sugar. Since we had nothing where we could carry it in, everybody got a handful of sugar, and you had to lick it right away because there was no other way and our hands were so filthy. We were smelling so much because a foreman in the factory didn't want to come close to us, we were smelling so badly, and they didn't want those lice. They can jump. (laugh) And, uh, we got there in the morning and we came home. We got bread. Sometimes with something on them. The portions got smaller, cause Germany didn't have much food themselves. And, uh, in the evening we got the so-called dinner which was soup, mostly soup where potatoes or rutabaga was cooked in, but the potatoes and the rutabaga were out, and that was all. Or, potatoes in the pan cooked we got sometime three or four potatoes as dinner. Christmas we had a very fancy dinner because they had slaughtered a horse and that tasted very good. And potatoes. Cooked. That was...but we were already on our way down physically, but when the International Red Cross came actually into the camp...there were four women coming in green uniforms, and we were standing in our five lines, and I heard the commandant in German tell them, "You just saw our beautiful shower installations. Look at those filthy Jews. They do not want to wash themselves. Those pigs." And, uh, none of those women asked the question why we didn't want to wash. There was no...if if they would have washed...or asked, I would have said whatever would have happened. But it was not possible. They had brought also sardines, and we got two women one can of sardines. Most of us got sick- we didn't have any fat for so long. They must have maybe brought also more potatoes or something because...and, oh, ja, green peas...because we had that on Christmas. No soap. (laughs) Nothing like it.

Q: Was there anyplace at all where you were allowed to wash ever?

A: No. In the factory, there was a toilet and they had a little sink this size and there was water. You couldn't wash yourself. Maybe you could drink little bit, but the half hour in between the...you know, to, uh, the hours, the twelve hours, was a half an hour time, but we had nothing to eat. We had eaten our bread. We had no pockets to put it in. So, uh, you couldn't...you couldn't leave it on your bed or so, because it would be stolen in one minute. So we ate it.

Q: What happened after the Red Cross came?

A: Nothing.

Q: Okay.

A: Nothing.

Q: How much longer were you in this condition before things changed?

A: Things never changed. Things got just bad uh when the war got bad. You see, I was always, when we marched to the factory, always in the last row because there were two soldiers with us and they spoke German. I could hear what they were saying to each other. And it was just uh music in my ears, because they said they were terribly upset. They hadn't heard for weeks from their families, and they said that Germany is bombed and then all of a sudden I heard that the Allies are in Nuremberg. And I thought, "In Nuremberg...in the middle of the country." And I told my friends and I said, "Oh, that cannot take long at all anymore. That must be over soon. They are already in Nurenberg." But we were the ones who really suffered so much because it was so cold and we had so little strength left. We buried our women that died. We didn't know the names. We maybe knew sometimes of their first name. We got very much in going into shells. We...we had no strength anymore to discuss, to talk, which we did in the beginning. We were playing word games, the ones who knew some and could do it, but that was over. You, you couldn't do that anymore. And, uh, then there must have gotten notice that if..if. . . the Russians would be coming to us, if they come, then would should be physically in the most perfect condition so they took us on a train to the next town where there was a prisoner camp- prisoner of war camp. We didn't know. They were French soldiers, and they were so upset when they saw us the way we looked, and they went with us into the uh sauna and they brought the hot water to us and they helped us. But that's all they- they could do. They wished they would have food, because we...we were full of edemas and we were in bad shape, and that took two days, this transport...all those people to that town, into, into this camp and getting home again. And, uh, I was sick. I was sick before that. I got, uh, you know...with the...where you get eye- the eye white..get the white of the eye get yellow...

Q: Jaundice?

A: Uh, ja, it's not jaundice, it was....

Q: Hepatitis?

A: Yes, ja, I got contagious hepatitis. I was terribly sick, and so that week because I couldn't eat. I couldn't eat, I only wanted to drink. And we had a so-called hospital in there and uh there was one Polish doctor. She was...she was Jewish. Uh, she was a lung specialist. And she had nothing to work with. Absolutely nothing. The only thing she had was hot water, and maybe some pain killer. I had no pain. I was just very, very weak. And uh, I guess she said I had more temperature than I really had. Otherwise, I would have to be out. I'm sure because I could hardly walk. I uh, also had an inflamed thumb. And that was throbbing and that was...got red up here and I had no water. I had nothing to...but in the factory where I was working on that machine, there was a file with a point and with that file I opened...filth. I opened it. The pus came out. Nothing happened. (laughs) Nothing happened. I had scarlet fever and nothing happened. I... That scarlet fever was still in Auschwitz because I brought it with me from the camp in uh Holland. There was an epidemic of scarlet fever. But uh I lived through all that and, uh, after we were cleaned. After we so-called cleaned, uh the rooms were very cold because they opened them. I don't know where they had the idea when the opened the window everything is clean you know. We had no mattresses anymore, we had just the plain wood. We did have some...the blankets were gone. The mattresses disappeared, and, uh, I have one uh experience which upset me afterwards very much. What I did. One time I...when we came...when I came home from work, I found a mattress in a bed nobody was in and took the mattress and covered myself and then when the others came, somebody was pulling on the mattress...wanted this mattress. So we were sleeping on, on loose boards, you know the...and I took one of...I got. . .I jumped out of bed. I took the board and lifting it up over her head, I thought I wanted to kill her. Taking my mattress. I mean that was just the most important thing. This protected me from this horrible cold. And that I really wanted to kill somebody. She dropped the mattress. She got (laugh) got scared. And I really probably would have. I don't know. Uh, in...also, there's another experience in this...in uh Kratzau. That's what I had started, and I thought it was in Auschwitz uh the factory had no material anymore, but the...those women from the SS had to do something, so they made us bringing coal from one corner to the other in the court, in those...you call those things with two wheels.

Q: The carts or the...

A: The cart, ja. So we always marched by...with a full one and there with an empty one. One time I when I came by I thought, "She's a nice looking young woman." She speaks German. I said uh, "I'm glad that I learn a job for after the war." So she looked at me and she stopped and I stopped. She said, "What do you mean." I said, "I can always go as a mover." She said, "That's a wonderful idea." So then I went on and I came back. She was surprised that I spoke fluently German. She said uh, "You come from Germany?" And I said, "Yes." She said uh,

"Why are you here?" I said, "What a question." "What did you do that you are here?" I said, "I didn't do anything. I'm Jewish." "No," she said, "You are all criminals. You all have done something. Look what you look like. The kind of clothes you are wearing." I said, "You really think those are our clothes?" She got, uh, a little...she said was a little funny because I spoke very good German, not like one who maybe was a criminal in any shape or form. There was another woman going by. I said, "Look at that woman with her cart. She has a Ph.D. Her father had one of the largest wine cellars in Amsterdam." She said, "You are, you're out of your mind." So I went on. When I came back, then she looked me over again, she didn't talk to me anymore. I asked her what she was doing. I know. I said, "What are you doing or what did you do?" She said, "I was a teacher in Hamburg." She...they were told that we were criminals. I said, "Our clothes were all taken from us. Those are clothes from other people, what you see, and they were never washed." Yet was a very interesting (laugh) conversation. I hope that it sticks in her mind. (laugh) That's all I can say to that. When we came closer to the end of the war, I think that's what you want to know. The, uh, ...and we were so-called clean, ready for the Russians...we were all very sick...because of the food and of diarrhea and the whole place was messy...24 hours. And, uh, we were one time again taken to another place where we were examined by a group of doctors and, uh, the German doctors, they talked German to each other. And so, they uh...when they saw...when I was...it was my turn, so they, uh, tried the nipple . . .to press my nipple and I pushed back and so one said to the other I had such an edema- my stomach was so swollen. He said I could have bet that she's pregnant. And, uh, I I said, "That would be a medical miracle." They pushed each other. They couldn't understand that somebody would say that at that...at that moment. But uh, that was about all they did. They saw the edemas. But, uh, we were walking still on our legs. But then one morning when we came out into the cold, the Germans were gone. The war was over. It was May 9th- that's very late. And, uh, the gates were open, and I marched out of the gate. I wanted to see it. I saw the lilies of the valley right in front, and I went into town. The town we had walked through every day and I always admired the butcher shop because he had a lot of sausages hanging there. And, uh, one day there was as I saw on the street, a little dog, such a round dog, and I said to the girl, "Wouldn't that be good roasted?" (laugh) And later, many later years when I told that to my husband, he couldn't believe that, that somebody would eat a roasted dog. I said, "Sure, I would have eaten anything." He could never understand that. So I saw the butcher shop when the war was over, and I went in. And I said if he would have some sausage for me. He said, "No." And I walked the street, and there was a Russian standing there, a soldier. He had a piece of black bread in one hand and a chicken leg in the other, and I walked up to him and I don't know Russian. I pointed to my stomach and to my mouth, and he give me both. Made me so sick. (laugh) It was much too rich. But that was the first day, and the third day I decided I was going home. I did not want to wait for what the uh, the owner...not . . .the man in charge of the factory, what he said to us, we should wait until the American or the International Red Cross would come and pick us all up, bring us to the countries where we belonged. I didn't believe it. I wanted to go home.

Q: Tell me a moment about the owner of the factory.

A: Was not owner. It was...must have been a, as I said before, a trustee.

Q: Okay.

A: The owner of the factory, I don't know. There were Germans who worked there, and they must have left uh when the Russians came so close and came there. And, uh, the, uh, the Russians came on the second day with the soup kitchen. And it was filthy, and the place was not clean because I left on the 12th and I didn't want to stay there and wait. I just had to go. Did not know where Kratzau was. I only know I had to go west. That's all I knew. And a 16 year old girl who was with the group from Amsterdam, she wanted to come with me. And I didn't want her. And I said it a few times. I said, "I don't want to take the responsibility. I'm going to places where I don't know myself." And, uh, "Oh," she said, "I want to go home. I want to find my mother. And you speak German. You can do it." So, she went with me, and uh come to the next station walking...train station, and there were not no trains anymore at all. So she said, "What are we going to do now?" And uh, I said, "I really don't know what we are going to do now. I suggest we go to the next town. Sit in the center of the town. They always have something green there. And the way we look women will come. They are curious. They will ask us who we are?" So the women came! And they said, uh, they could do something for us. They spoke German--in Sudaten. And uh, I said we would like to get hot water to wash ourselves. We would like to get a bed, and we also would like something to eat. She said you can have all that to eat. She said, "A chicken died today." If you want me, I'll prepare it for you. I said, "Why not? I have always have eaten dead chickens." (laughter) They were never alive. I was so happy with that chicken. She boiled it and it was very good and we could clean ourselves. And uh, the next day we went on and found another town where they told us that probably that day a train would come, probably. And a train did come and we just went on. There was nobody to talk to and, uh, during the night the train stopped and the Russians came on to the train. They had flashlights and they looked...had the flashlights on us and then they touched our...touched us here **[points to stomach]** and then they wanted to go and then I said again my stomach that we are hungry. So they gave us sardines. (laughs) Sardines. So I I said, they would have to open it. We had nothing. And they did. I found out not too much later that they were looking for Germans to take them back and then feeling here and the rest they felt we were women, because you, you know, the way we looked and the hair and all that, they didn't know what it was. But, uh, that's how they found out we were women and left us alone and gave us the sardines. So uh we took a lot of trains. We took one train that was...uh a train with all beds. German train with all beds, white, clean...was wonderful...just wonderful. There was no food there, but there was a good bed. And when the train stopped and we went into town, we begged. I begged for bread. I only wanted bread. Because I was used to that bread takes away the hunger. Bread and water was fine. In some place, they had nothing. They give us an umbrella. (laugh) That was the...the, the . .. uh, the mayor's office we went in...we didn't know, and they gave us an umbrella. And I said, "Thank you." And they had no food. So I took the umbrella and I put it throw away. Was dumb, probably I could have changed it for some bread. I don't know.

Q: How long did it take you to get to where you were going at this point?

A: Home? Six and one half weeks. But, uh, we came to the first American DP camp built. It was just finished in Plzen.

Q: How long were you in Plzen?

A: In Plzen, we were told that the DP camp was being built, that we should look for it. And we found it. And there were about 400 people there already all lying in the big gymnasium, something like it, on the floor. Men and women who had been uh workers, who had been picked up in different countries, and everybody wanted to go a different place. They were there and had blankets and we were all lying on the floor. There were no Jews. We were the only Jews. And that was a strange thing. We couldn't...I couldn't understand that. So then we were a little bit examined, and we became uh double rations and that started anti-Semitism in those four or five hundred people. That the Jews here, look what they give those women. Was difficult, very difficult, until then the Americans had trucks, open trucks and brought us farther west because that's where we wanted to go. Also, there was a lists going from this place all over the world who was there surviving, and that came to Chicago and they found out to Chicago... sorry...to Amsterdam to find out that I was alive, but they didn't know where. They only knew the name was there. That was all those lists were...Chicago. (laughs) And, uh, we were in an open truck to Leipzig where there was a very large DP camp, about 25,000, and there were maybe 25 Jews. That was all. Uh, there I went to...I asked I wanted to go to a gynecologist. I wanted to find out if they would do something to me that I was not...uh, had not, all that time, uh, no ...what's the word?

Q: 'Cause you were not menstruating?

A: That's right. Ja. So, uh, and this was a German gynecologist, and he looked at me and I looked a little funny. By that time I was clean. By that time I had no lice anymore because there was a medical tent in this camp and I walked in with my little friend and I said, "Listen, we have so much lice. Can you help us? The Germans have tried to delouse us so many times, they never could." "That's nothing," they said. We wanted to take our dress off and they said, "Don't do that." They had a large spray machine which was used to discharge white powder under the arms and under the skirt, and two hours later all those lice were dead and I thought the Americans they really know it. They had DDT and they didn't know at that time, they had killed more than lice. So I went to this doctor, because I was clean and he looked at me and he looked at all the edemas, and he said uh, "Where were you? Where do you come from?" I said, "I was in uh extermination camp." He called his nurse in..and he said, "Listen what that woman says. Look what she looks like. 70 pounds and swollen." He said, "Tell me." So he and she, they listened. He did not know those details. He had no idea. He surely knew that the Jews had been gone, but he did not know what they had done to them. That was in the city of Leipzig.

Q: We have relatively little time I would like to move us to what happened when you came back to Amsterdam.

A: Ja. That is.. Ja. The, uh...when I came to the border. We came to the border with an American train. Took six days because we had to built pontoon bridges. The American soldiers did not give us anything to eat or to drink. They didn't understand what I meant when I said that we had nothing to eat. They didn't understand. Six days. We were very sick. We came to the border. We had to walk over the border because the train only stopped there and we got into an office. We only could get on the train if you said you were uh, a Dutch citizen, which I said and I was not, and uh, the bureaucracy came and I, as a good German, said right away, "I am not a Dutch citizen. I am stateless." And the man had never heard what stateless is, but that young girl with me who was very happy to be home said, "Be careful with that woman. She is a German, and she is an enemy of our country." She confused that man completely and he put me in jail. And, uh, I've never seen her again. I didn't want to see her. She was in Holland. She was saved. We were together for six and a half weeks. I was a mother and she was a child, in a way. And that's what happened. Though uh, two days later the Rabbi of Eindoven that was the town where it happened, got me out of jail. I don't know...I forgot his name, but he found out. I don't know how, and I got with another lie and big screaming, uh,...permission to go to Amsterdam because there were no trains...there was no...and I wanted to go to Amsterdam. So I came there, and I found the people who had helped us and, uh, they told me that my daughter was fine, which was the most important thing.

Q: Describe two things please. The meeting with your daughter please, and then how you found your husband.

A: I didn't find my husband. He never came back.

Q: Okay. Tell me what happened to him.

A: I don't know.

Q: I'm sorry.

A: Ja. I don't know what happened. I don't know. I saw him the last time before I was going in to this place where the women were in the black dresses. I never have seen him again and there is no...there is no record for the dead. There's a record of the trains...the numbers of the trains and how many people were in the trains, all the trains deporting the Jews, you know that? So I have it. And, uh, all the trains I have been in are there, but they have no record of who died. Uh, they told me that Doris was fine and the next day one of the friends had a jeep because there was nothing else and he brought me to that town where she was. They had told her already that I had been sick and that I was better and I would come, but nobody knew when. In that little village where she was, all the girls who had had relationships with German soldiers, when the war was over were brought into the center of the city and their heads were shaved. And she thought it was so funny. Kids, you know, you know, they didn't understand. And so here I was with a shaved head and she looked at me and she said, "Are

you my mother?" I said, "Yes, I'm your mother." I didn't come close to her. I didn't touch her. And she was eating lunch because afternoon school starts she said, "I would like to go to school that...she said to our friend, Rinus, she said, "Rinus, If you could bring me with your jeep to the school, I would like the kids to see the jeep. So that's what they did. Not me. And, uh, I did something very wrong. I asked the lady where she was if I could take her with me that day. Leave everything there. Anyway probably thinking I bring her back, but I didn't. I took her with me. And we had nothing. We had no bed. Nothing. I uh, felt I needed her. I needed her very much. We need our children more than they need us. That's something I have learned. I needed her and I did it. So uh, some of the friends gave us a room with one bed and we slept there. We, uh...we made it. We got rooms and we could rent because there was no place and, uh, since my husband didn't come back. A year and a half later we went to the United States where my parents were. And she was very happy to have grandparents, to have uh, cousins, uncles...we didn't have.

Q: Did the two of you...Did she adjust to you?

A: It must have taken her a long time. I don't think that I was aware of what I had done to take her out of this secure home in this life with a woman who wasn't completely normal. I'm convinced. I was the only one who didn't know. But I'm convinced. And she, uh...I was only looking for a place for us to live that we were just like a family and that she would...she would be home and I'm the mother. But we never discussed it, practically all our lives. Uh, it was sometimes when she was maybe...that time when I picked her up she was seven-and-a-half. Maybe when she was...when she was still in Amsterdam, one day she did something which I said she shouldn't. She said, "I wish you wouldn't have come." And that was the only time as a child.

Q: Okay. I think we are about done, and I thank you.

A: You're welcome.

Q: Very much. Thank . ..

A: But my daughter had learned. Ja, and we never discussed it.

Q: Did she know?

A: We never discussed it. Uh, there is a book out about I Never Said Goodbye.

Q: Ya.

A: You know it?

Q: Ya.

A: And I...when it came out, there was a write up in the paper, and she happened to be visiting from Israel, and I said, "That's a very interesting book. I would like to read it." And she looked at it. I said, I'm only very much upset that all those people who say they were abandoned, say that still after they have children themselves. Don't they want to protect their children?" "No," she said, "I can understand." I wasn't abandoned. It was the first time, and, uh, "I said I will never learn that, never and never accept it." She uh, went to New York then, and then she found the book and she send it to me and she put in there, "Thank you for giving me life twice." It wasn't necessary to discuss it. Really. It would have made our relationship painful if we would have discussed it. If I would have constantly heard that I see it from the wrong way then I never could. So that...um that she has understood after all those years. We have a very good relationship now.

Q: That is good. When did she first know...that, when did you first tell her that you had not just been sick? How old was she when you picked her up?

A: When I picked her up she was seven-and-a-half. Oh, I talked about the camp to anybody.

Q: Oh, you did? Okay. So she knew then?

A: Ja, but it was . . .it didn't really sink in that . . .No, no really not at that time- much later. And when I started to study all the books, much later, when I started to speak, she, in some way I . . .

End of Tape #2
Conclusion of Interview