

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Gerda Schild Haas
June 12, 1995
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Gerda Schild Haas, conducted by Joan Ringelheim on June 12, 1995 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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GERDA SCHILD HAAS

June 12, 1995

01:00:02

Q: Good morning.

A: Good morning.

Q: Could you tell us your full name and where and when you were born.

A: I'm Gerda Haas, born Gerda Schild in Ansbach which is a small town in Germany – Bavaria – and I was born in November of 1922.

Q: And can you tell us something about your family, your sister, your parents.

A: Yes. Ansbach was – had a very religious Jewish community. We had some famous rabbanim¹ there – Elie Munk for instance who wrote *The World Of Prayer*, wrote it there in Ansbach while I was his student, and I was very friendly with him. We always experienced some anti-Semitism in Bavaria – not outright – but we always felt we didn't belong to the whole town, so it was a strong and purposeful Jewish community that we had. And almost everybody was deeply religious. My father was the Jewish butcher in town, naturally kosher. There was nothing else. And we lived in a nice, heavy, solid stone house where we had lived for many years. My grandmother lived with us, my Aunt Adelheid, an unmarried aunt and there were two girls, myself and my sister Friedl. So it was a warm, extended, nice family.

Q: Did your mother work?

A: No. Mother only went into the butcher store when it got very busy. It wasn't done in those days. Mothers didn't work.

Q: Tell me what the relationships were like in the family.

A: We were very close. It was understood that the younger generation took care of the older generations. There was never a question about it. We didn't even have any old age homes. There was a little separate apartment for my grandmother where she could do her own cooking if she wanted to, but I have never seen – I never remember that she did. She always ate and lived with us. And my Aunt Adelheid was – she had her own little business. She kept chickens and sold chickens, and I remember a lot how she took care of hens, and how she took us out with her into the yard and we could feel for the eggs, and that was always a lot of fun. It was a very primitive, solid, early 1900's kind of a context that I grew up on.

¹ Rabbis (Hebrew)

Q: And were these hens in your yard?

A: Yeah, right in the backyard of our house. It was a big house and you walked through and out into the yard, and there were the hens on one side and my father's sausage making machinery would be way down on the other side. And my mother's vegetable garden on this side over here. And our swing where my sister and I swang and played ball was on this corner here, and it was fun. We had very happy childhood until Hitler came when I was ten.

01:03:31

Q: Were you closer to one parent more than another?

A: If possible, closer to my mother because she was more around. Father used to get up at four in the morning to buy the cows that he needed for his butcher shop, and then he had to go to the next town to have them shekhted, the Jewish way of slaughtering the meat. And then he had to come back and he cut up that whole animal right in the backyard. I wasn't squeamish about it. And so he was always busy. And when he came home he was short tempered you know – the customers aggravated him. Mother always was even tempered and sweet and kind and pleasant.

Q: Did you ever work in the butcher store?

A: No. I only went there to get some sausage – eat a little bit.

Q: And did Aunt Adelheid provide chickens for your father?

A: Yes. Aunt Adelheid provided Father with the chickens. They's also have to be shekhted the kosher way. I remember that quite well. At one time there was a phenomenon of a chicken running around with his head cut off already, the proverbial – he wasn't – somehow it didn't die right away and flattered or flipped around for a few minutes.

Q: Was your family religious?

A: Yes, very religious – very Orthodox. There was nothing else in small towns. In fact, in all of Germany you were either very religious or you weren't aware of your Jewishness at all – you were very, very Reformed. Conservative Judaism had not been invented, yet. So, yes, we were very religious and interestingly enough, the religion was state supported. In other words we always had to mark on taxes or on any forms – on birth certificates, wedding forms or anything – our affiliation. It was always Jewish because the state paid for the upkeep of the synagogue. The state paid for the salary of the Rabbi or the Hazan, or the Shohet. So there was never a question that we were very Jewish, and everybody knew that and everybody, up to a certain point, respected it too.

01:06:01

Q: Did you have non-Jewish friends growing up?

A: Yes, we did have non-Jewish friends but not real good chums. They were just the kids on the block that we played with. My parents didn't restrict us in going out with only Jewish people. It didn't seem a problem. We knew so much where we belonged and who we were that there was no danger for us to intermingle or anything. So, yes, we did have non-Jewish friends up to a certain point. But the real close friends were the Jewish people.

Q: And when you went to school, it was a mixed school?

A: Yes. In grade school. I don't remember too much about grade school, but then I went to the Lyzeum – that was like it would here be maybe a high school, and then junior college. That was already considered higher education. The girls went to the Lyzeum and the boys went to the Gymnasium,² which here is an athletic term, but over there it was an academic term. So, yes I do remember that very well. I was admitted in 1933 at the age of 10 only because I could prove that my father was a World War I veteran. Already, Hitler had just come to power in January. I was admitted to school that fall. And I remember I had to bring some proof that my father had received the Iron Cross First Class in World War One and otherwise I could not have gone. I would have already been repelled as a Jewish student. So I did go, but I didn't stay very long. In 1936 there was a law that – it was phrased in that way – German students do no longer have to be subjected to sitting in the same room with Jewish students. So of course it was the Jewish students who had to leave. I always thought it was a very interesting way of framing it. In those early years Hitler was still a little bit more cautious and modest in his demands on us than he was later on. But up to then we were accepted. We did not – slowly we did not chum around with the German children anymore. I remember there were two Jewish students in my class, myself and Matilda Adler(ph). How some names will stay with you all your life! And she and I were, little by little, we were ostracized. I remember us standing in the corner in the school yard. We couldn't mingle with the other kids anymore. And they weren't mean to us, but they were not allowed to be friendly to us. If they would, they were being punished. And I also remember that I was not allowed to answer questions in school, even if I knew the answer. After a while I didn't even raise my hand anymore because I knew the teacher could not possibly call on me. As a Jewish student I was supposed to be stupid. I was supposed to be ignorant. I was not – Jews – Hitler declared Jews as stupid, so how could I know any answers? And that hurt a while but then I got use to it. But finally in '36 we had to leave. And I got as far as fourth grade in there instead of the ordinary sixth grade. I didn't graduate. And that hurt because I didn't know what else to do. I couldn't stay at home – and I couldn't go to any other school, so that the childhood years were happy, but the school years already were not. And my sister who was a year ahead of me – same story. She was the only Jewish girl in her class and she was even more ostracized and picked upon – and she was more timid than I was. I was always more the “tomboy” type and she was very much more gentle and introverted than I was. So

² High school (German)

she suffered actually more than I did. And when we came home we talked a little about it, but then we tried to forget it and just integrate into our family.

01:10:45

Q: Did your parents give you any advice about what to do when you came home and talked about this kind of abuse?

A: Did my parents give me any advice? I would say “no.” My parents already were wrapped up in their own problems. Already, very early in Hitler's reign, the Schechtverbot³ came – and I think what you mean by that. The Jews were no longer allowed to kill their animals in the ritualistic way by shekhting. And I always thought that was such an irony. The reason Hitler gave for that Schechtverbot was, it was inhumane to the animals. Think about that for a minute. For the animals he had pity, but for us – he put us into the gas. There was no more inhumanity involved there. So in ‘38, being very considerate for those poor animals, there was the Schechtverbot. And then Father had his own problems. I remember how Father and Mother and grandmother and Aunt Adelheid used to sit in the room and just try to figure out what the future will bring. Now all he had to sell were the chickens, you see. For a while there was frozen meat from Argentina, but who's going to buy frozen meat in 1936. It was unheard of. Nobody would touch it – and so he gave that up very quickly. And then there was no more income, except for that little bit that we made on the chickens. And they were having problems. For a long time I remember Father saying, “Mir gehen mit dem letzten Zug.⁴” That was Bayerisch⁵ – that was Bavarian dialect for “We're going to go with the last train. We're going to stick it out. We're not gonna leave here.” But after a while he had to realize that there was no “letzten Zug.” There was not gonna be a last train. So they had their own problems, and no, we didn't bother them with our problems. They couldn't have helped us anyway. If we ever confided into anyone it was Aunt Adelheid and grandmother. They seemed to – they were very close to us. Does that give you a little picture of my home life? It was a nice, close, lovely family. And then came 1938 – Kristallnacht⁶. For a while the non-Jews were moderate in their intercourse with us. They held back, but they weren't hostile. And I remember some of the closer non-Jewish friends used to come to the back door at night when no one would see them and used to bring us maybe a little bread or some fruit because already we couldn't buy everything we wanted to. All of a sudden that was – the Jews couldn't really buy what they wanted.

01:13:37

Q: Can you explain that some because I – what kinds of restrictions there were, on movement and purchase–

³ Shekht prohibition (German)

⁴ We are going with the last train (Bavarian German)

⁵ Bavarian (German)

⁶ Crystal Night (German); Night of Broken Glass.

A: Well, little by little the merchants would become hostile to us. And when they saw us coming the better things would disappear under the counter, like the better fruits. I remember there were always Blut Orangen⁷ from America – that was those red oranges from America which was – that was just a delicacy for us. I remember that so much. Mother used to bring that home once in a while. But then as time went on, there were no more Blut Orangen. They disappeared the minute they saw us coming. And so, little by little, there was hostility. And dearth by us, after a little while, and we became poor. I remember how we used to sit around that Blaupunkt radio that we had. I can still remember that so well. You used to turn the knob and the whole dial would zoom back and forth. You didn't have to turn the knob little by little. You just touched it a little and the dial would fly away from you and you had to catch it to where you wanted it. But no matter which station you took, there was always Hitler's voice on the radio – always this frightening voice – this loud, hypnotizing speech that he gave – always against the Jews and how he would make the life of the Germans better and better if they would just follow him and do away with the Jews – and the Jews had taken all their good things – and the whole Versailles Treaty was the fault of the Jews. The huge banners that came up over Ansbach that used to say, “Die Juden sind unser Unglück⁸” – “The Jews are our misfortune. Everything bad that happened to the Germans is the fault of the Jews.” And my sister and I used to slink by those huge banners that were all over the city and we used to try just not to see them, thinking if we didn't see them, they weren't there. But they were there. Little by little that really took over. And I remember the torch parades that came. Hitler visited Ansbach many times actually. It was a stronghold for the SA, the earlier group as you know. First came the SA and then came the SS The SA was the Sturmabteilung⁹ and then the SS was the Schutzstaffeln¹⁰. They actually – it started out as a personal body guard of Hitler, but then the SA was pushed aside and the SS became the dominant military and civil force in Germany. But I remember still the SA going down our cobblestone streets with their large torches and singing and marching. And these were all young kids that we still knew at one time before they became SA It was always frightening. And when Hitler came into town the Jews, of course, were ordered to stay away – stay off the streets. And also an interesting thing was, in the Nuremberg Laws what we thought was the least ominous law was, that the Jews could not fly the German flag. That, you know, we thought that we could live with. Well, who wants it to fly the German flag? But it turned out that was also a seminal law. Right away they could tell which house was Jewish because everybody else had to fly the flag. So that was also an interesting law. That was up to Kristallnacht. After that it was no problem anyway.

01:18:14

Q: Prior to Kristallnacht, do you remember seeing anyone beaten up? Were you ever in a

⁷ Blood oranges (German)

⁸ The Jews are our misfortune (German)

⁹ Storm troopers (German)

¹⁰ Protection Squads (German)

difficult situation?

- A: No, except the kids used to – after a while they threw stones at us, or they made snowballs with a stone inside you know and hit it at us, and we didn't know. And that was, of course, like a missile. And we couldn't retaliate. We couldn't throw a snowball back. Number one, we were much too timid, and number two, they would have just killed us if we had. They were already – now the Hitlerjugend.¹¹ Both the boys and the girls had to be in the Hitlerjugend, the youth organization of the SS, and they were all powerful. When they had their little Hitlerjugend's uniforms on, they felt like they were God themselves. Otherwise, back to your question, no, I have not seen anyone being beaten up. But I will tell you, we didn't provoke them. We stayed in our houses and we slunk around the streets and if we saw anyone–
- Q: Mrs. Haas, can you go back to this time and talk a little bit about the intimidation that you were feeling. You said that you would walk sort of in a frightened way and would stay in your house. What was this doing to you and your sister?
- A: Well, when you are 10 years old and from that time on, and my sister was only a year and a half older, when you're constantly told that you are stupid, and – they called it "Untermensch,"¹² "subhuman" – and you personally are responsible for everything that's going wrong in all of Germany, and practically in all the world, and you can't shine in any way. You can't let your imagination, or your intellect, or your normal physical appearances come up and speak for yourself – for itself, after a while that does something to you. After a while – after 10 years of this, you believe you are stupid. You believe you look Jewish and you look ugly and you are not worthy of anything. And it really took a while to get over this. And you know I see some older people nowadays that have gone through this whole thing and it looks to me as if they haven't gotten over it yet. They still feel that they are the less human – the lesser human race – and I still – they look depressed to me. I think I got over it, but during the time I believed I was no good. I believed I was a second rate human being. It was a terrible thing to do. And you must understand, on the other hand, these very same kids that went to school with me who up to then were nothing, they came from a downtrodden, broken home, they had no clothes to wear, they – in many cases they had to come to the Jewish families to beg for food and substances, they were suddenly dressed up in their Nazi uniforms and their – first in their Hitlerjugend uniforms, which were splendid. They were beautiful, and later on they were dressed up in their SA and SS uniforms, underneath they were still very mediocre, very pedestrian German people. But all of a sudden they were shining, they were beautiful. And don't forget, a uniform really does something to you psychologically. These people not only had their uniform on, but they felt they were the uniform. They felt they could do beautiful things just because they looked so great. And they did. They got away with it.

¹¹ Hitler youth (German)

¹² Sub-human (German); term used to refer to people deemed inferior according to Nazi racial theory.

01:22:14

As you very well know, one of the very first laws that Hitler put onto the books in Germany was the Gestapo Law of 1936 which stated that anyone in an SS, in a Nazi uniform, would stand above the law – could do anything they wanted to, could up to kill the Jews openly on the street. As long as they were in their Nazi uniform the law could not touch them. Now if you think of it, we on the other hand were since the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, staatenlos,¹³ stateless. That means we had no recourse to the law. Any injustice that was done to us, forget it. There was no law to go to, to complain. But they – and the psychological effect of that is not to be underestimated. They were indeed the supermen the all powerful, unapproachable. No law could touch them. And as we, when we were ten years old were told how low we were, they were told how great they were – and by the time they were 20 and 25 and we met them again in the killing centers, their psychology had changed just as much as ours had. I don't know how to impress upon you what a uniform will do a person. It suddenly makes him into a semi-god. And Hitler was no dummy about that. His uniforms were beautiful, shiny; those boots, those helmets, all those buttons and rows of things. And then the names, they all of a sudden were – they weren't just Johann Schmidt anymore – they were Oberscharführer¹⁴ and they were Blockleiter.¹⁵ And the kids already they were – I can't remember all the German names, but suddenly they got a title. They were somebody. And they had quite forgotten that underneath the uniform there was really nothing much, but that's – but you don't know that when you're stuck in it. You only know that 50 years later when you acquire a little overview and a little insight. But that was part of the success of the Nazis – those uniforms, and the singing, and the torch parades. That was uplifting to them and to the spectators – to the people who watched. They suddenly belonged.

01:24:24

Q: Did you ever get angry at this when you were – during this period?

A: I don't think so. I don't think we were angry. I don't think we were allowed anger. We were just allowed fear, fear and trembling. I still remember so well when they sat around the table at night and worried, and worried, “What are we going to do? What are we going to do with the kids?” We couldn't go to school anymore. “How are we gonna live?” Anger was far away. Worry and fear was the dominant emotions. And then the belief in God, that never left us. “God will help. God will bring resolution. Hitler won't last long. Hitler's gonna be gone from the scene by Christmas. Hitler's gonna be gone from the scene by spring. No, he wasn't.” We believed our own wishes. We didn't believe *Mein Kampf*¹⁶ and all the raging speeches that he gave – that he prophesied that he would make Germany “Judenrein.” That

¹³ Stateless (German)

¹⁴ Upper crowd leader (German)

¹⁵ Block leader (German)

¹⁶ My Struggle (German)

was the big deal. It went in one ear and out the other for us. What does he mean “Judenrein”? This is not a word we grew up with. So we ignored it. But he knew what he meant and he did it too. Now I get angry when I think about it, but in those days, no, there was no anger. There was only great, great fear. And then we gathered around our Rabbi and he told us... Everybody was so short-sighted. Everybody was so blind. Even the Rabbi, whom we thought had real insight and foresight and a direct line to God you know, he said, "Don't worry. Everything will be alright. Don't leave Ansbach. Stay, stay, stay." But unfortunately, then he was the first to leave. He went and got a job in Paris as a Rabbi and he left. And that opened our eyes after that. We too began to leave. That hurt me more than anything else – that our Rabbi left us our beloved Rabbi. It's like your father leaving you. That was interesting in retrospect.

Q: When did he leave?

A: I mustn't get too wound up in all my memories and emotions here.

Q: When did he leave?

A: When did he leave? He left – I think he left in '36 before Kristallnacht. I'm not sure on that anymore. It might have been after Kristallnacht. I'm not sure anymore. But I was especially close to him and to all his children and to his wife, and I felt a great sense of loss when he left so suddenly without telling us – and still preaching to the last minute – “Stay, be calm, God will help, God will send rescue.” And in the meantime he had already arranged for himself a job in Paris.

Q: Did that make you cynical?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: Did that make you cynical in some way?

A: I was too young to know what cynical was. Those emotions you are mentioning are luxuries. We were just plain, down to earth. We just dealt with the basics here – hope, anger and always the belief in God. That never left us. And in a way it was a big help. It was a big help. We would have despaired if we didn't have that, that hope for the future.

01:29:05

Q: Did you maintain religious observance?

A: Yes. I did. I did, but in a modified way. We grew up very religious, as I said. There was nothing else. And we adored our Rabbi. We would do anything he would tell us to. And I'm not only speaking of my sister and myself. But that whole youth group whose picture you have seen. We gathered around him every Shabbos and we were devoted to him. That great

faith, I think, helped me a great deal, because later on when things really got... What I'm telling you now, that's not bad. That's just the beginning. But later on when things really got bad, then there was nothing else to cling to. And I wonder if people understand that, that you can still be religious and believe in God even though you see what – let's say, what God is doing all around you. I don't want to have to explain what I just said. But on the one hand you see all the evil that – in our religious mind was still sent from God. And on the other hand, you come inward and you still believed he would help – and that was a big help. It really was. It sounds like an irony, but it was a big help. And then later on when I was rescued, and I found my father again. Then again also my mother and my whole family had died. Again there was at least that much reason to be grateful to God who had saved me, and had saved my father. And then I married a religious man. I tried to bring up my children religious. And it's a problem. You can't live without it and you can't live with it, but most of all you can't live without it. So it's a way of life now. It's a way of life.

01:31:22

Q: When you got kicked out of Lyzeum, when you couldn't go anymore – when the Jewish children couldn't go – what was the decision of your parents?

A: Yes. I remember that very well also. My sister was already old enough. First of all she had graduated. She was two years ahead of me. She had graduated from the Lyzeum and now she – there was nothing else to do. There was no post-graduate or college or anything – forget it. She could either go to Hakhshara¹⁷ to prepare herself for Israel – for Palestine, but remember we were going with the last train so there was no need to go to Palestine. We weren't leaving Ansbach. So she went to a girls Landwirtschaftschule¹⁸ – a girls preparation for... just to be a wife and a mother. It wasn't Landwirtschaftschule, it was Wolfratshausen. How can I explain it to you? It was a preparatory school for young women – for young ladies. I remember she came back and she showed me how she learned how to fold linens so that they would look like military in the shelves. You know, that's the kind of thing they learned. Much good that did us. And I was too young to go there, so I went to the one Jewish school that was still in existence. That was the Adass Jisroel Schule in Berlin. Now Berlin was far from Ansbach. It was like 300 kilometers and that was far. Remember, we're in 1930s in Europe. We're not in the 1990s in America. Berlin was far and I didn't know anybody. I had to live in the dormitory and I didn't know any kids. And now the bigger problem was that I didn't have the correct preparation for a Jewish school. I had only gone to my Rabbi during the section that was called “religion,¹⁹” – “religion,” when the Catholics went to their priests and the Protestants went to their father, to their religious leader, we went to Elie Munk, to Rabbi Munk. And that's all the religious education we had that one hour a week where we had religion. So I was not prepared for that and of course I did very poorly. So that reinforced my thinking that I really was stupid and minor, even in the Jewish school I

¹⁷ Hakhshara He-Halutz [Pioneer Training] (Hebrew)

¹⁸ Agricultural school (German)

¹⁹ Religion (German)

couldn't excel, you see. So it was tough. And then I was called home after Kristallnacht. I remember driving through Berlin and seeing the synagogues in flames and all the glass on the streets and the people huddled and depressed. And it was very obvious that what had impacted upon me psychologically had impacted on all the Jews. They walked around like the victims – like the hunted. And I was in the train, and I was going toward Ansbach, and there my family had been taken to a collection center. Father had been sent to prison along with all the men. And Mother and all the women had already been sent back home and were packing. And we couldn't take more than we had that we could carry, and we had to leave everything. And I remember the name of the man that was just – just a very simple little fellow who was ordered by the Nazis to take over our house. And he already had moved in with his eight kids. And we were still packing and leaving and going to the railroad station, and then we realized really what was going on. Then Father didn't talk about the last train anymore. And, then we went – we could only go to certain cities. We couldn't just pick up and leave and buy a new house, or go to a new apartment – far from it. We were told which cities to go to and we were told to go to Munich, and we were also told to just find someone to live with. And we found a distant relative – well it doesn't matter – there was some relationship there, who took us into one spare room that they had. And then Father and all the uncles and cousins all came back, all their hair shorn. The Munich Jews had been sent to Dachau, whereas the Ansbach Jews had been sent to, to prison in Nuremberg. And I remember how they all came back from the Dachau with their heads completely shorn, and then we began to wake up. Then we still only thought that the men were in danger. Who could think that they would kill women and children, or old people, or Rabbis, or respected business people or anything? So then Father was lucky and he got onto a convoy that the British Jews had organized and he got into that convoy as a butcher, and they went to Sandwich, England, to the Kitchener camps, with the hope – this was in July of 1939. There was no talk of war, yet. Hitler kept that very secret. It was – that was like a bombshell when the war started. So in July, a little more than one month before the beginning of the war in Poland, there was no fear of war. So we thought that my father could find domestic positions for us and bring us over after him. But the war ended that.

Q: Do you think there was any talk of all of you going at once or could only the men go?

01:37:33

A: That was only a transport for men from 18 to 45 years old and Father was just 45. It was a miracle he even got in.

Q: So your father's in England and you're all in Munich.

A: So Father left. It was very traumatic because families were sacred – were holy. You didn't separate. You didn't divorce. That was not heard of. That was unheard of. You didn't leave your family. You didn't separate. You didn't leave your family alone. So that was very traumatic when my father left in that train in the railroad station in Munich. And my mother

who was a typical Orthodox Jewish woman with a shaytel²⁰ on and completely helpless. Everything she did – she ever did, she was told by her husband. People were like that. I know it sounds medieval, but they were married off as youngsters, completely naive and then they were told, "Your husband will tell you what to do." And my father always told her what to do. And all of a sudden she was alone. And I remember how devastated she was and how helpless at first. But then she had to learn. The money – the little bit of money that she received from the house was put into an account and she was only allowed a little sum every month. And she had to go and humiliate herself and beg for that – her own money – to get a little money so she could live another month. And then she sent us away. She sent my sister to Frankfurt, to the Jewish hospital. It was called Gagernstrasse. And I was a little too young to be a nurse. I was just old enough to be a baby nurse. And there's a division we don't have in this country, but I became a baby nurse. I was barely seventeen, and I was to Berlin.

01:39:49

Q: Can I go back for a moment. The day that your father left or the few days before when you knew that he was going to leave, did he talk with you in any particular way. Was there – or do you just – you remember the train station?

A: I remember the train station very vividly. I'm sure he talked with my mother, but the talk was not – not morbid. The goodbye was not like a final thing – like a finite goodbye. It was, "I'll do all I can to get you positions." And the British helped. The British Jews helped. And it worked for many people in that transport. Later on in New York I met many comrades of my father's who had gone with him into the transport and they were able to bring their wives and children, and mothers and fathers over to England still. But somehow it just didn't work for my father. After he died I found his notebook that he wrote. Every day he went and tried to find a family who would take us in. Of course he didn't speak English. He had no money. It just didn't work. But of course we also thought we had all the time in the world.

01:41:13

Q: So your mother's decision was to get something practical for both of her daughters?

A: Yes. Yes. And I remember she couldn't quite manage with money because she had only so little bit. So she went to a cousin of mine who still was there and he helped her out so that she could pay for me. It was such a small sum compared to now, but still she didn't have it. And so we left, and again it was – it was not a big goodbye. But as soon as I was in Berlin, then we had to wear the star. Then there was a law that we couldn't travel. Then there was a law we couldn't use telephones – public telephone stations. So all of a sudden we were completely cut off from her. No way of going back and no way of talking with her – just letters, letters, letters, letters. And she – the letters that she wrote to my father, she always tried to include letters from us. And my father gave me that whole bunch of letters. I still

²⁰ Wig (Yiddish)

have it at home. First she writes – and she writes always the same – "How am I going to get out of here? What's my quota? Who is going to help me? How am I going to find the money to..." Just this grinding, grinding worry all the time. And then the one ray of sunshine, "And I include a letter from the children." So she always waited until she got mail from us, from my sister in Frankfurt and from me. And we wrote, more or less normal – how we enjoyed our training – especially I, I worked with children, you see. And my sister, how she liked being trained as a nurse and how interesting it was, and how she made friends. This was a new life for her. All of a sudden my sister had friends, and she could shine, and she was a great nurse. And she sent back a picture in her uniform. Now she too had a uniform. That was really something. Those were a couple of happy years that we had. And I too had a uniform.

01:43:31

Q: So somehow or other, even the separations, and the restrictions being more heavier in some way, your life nevertheless was okay during those two years.

A: Yes. Yes. I would say so. We wrote to my mother all the time and she wrote back. Of course to us she didn't write these – these heavy letters. To us she just told what she did and who she met and how she manages. For the first time in her life she was alone. She grew up in a family with five sisters. She was never, never, never alone. She never went to school or anything. And all of a sudden she was quite alone. That was traumatic. So she wrote what she did.

Q: Did she remain in that apartment where you first came?

A: Yes – No. Those people left – those distant relatives. They all left. And I remember how she – how hurt she was. They all left kind of secretly. All of a sudden, you know. There was a great jealousy among the Jews against those who could leave and those who could not leave. And there was a great rivalry also you see. The ships' places were very rare, and the quota was coveted – to be on the quota was heaven – to finally reach the quota. So the people who were lucky like that kept that very secret – very much to themselves. They didn't say. And then all of a sudden, this family left. I met them again years later in New York and that was a big blow to us. And we stuffed – they finally allowed us to put a few things into their lift – into their package – and that's how we saved a very few of our treasured things that weren't so valuable, but they were very much treasured by us. And when I met them again in New York, of course I was also... In a way we were very grateful for them. They had taken us in. But in another way we felt very hurt that they snuck out. So that apartment was confiscated by the Nazis and we had to find another Jewish family. Now it got much more difficult already. So there was this Frau Frankel(ph) who took us in, who had – her husband was still alive. And I met them later in Theresienstadt again. She and my mother then became friends. She was an elderly woman.

Q: So did your mother move in to Mrs. Frankel's house?

A: Frankel's house, yes. That was the only way you could live anywhere. You had to move in with someone. You couldn't rent an apartment – please. You have to think how this was now '39. Hitler was very outspoken what he was going to do with us. And that whole, that whole concentration into bigger cities, and to live with other Jews, that was nothing but a preparation for picking us up with greatest of ease to take us onto the deportations, you see. They didn't have to go anymore to the little farmhouses and to the little hamlets and to the little towns. They were already Judenrein.²¹ And you could see now, how that was a systematic concentration of the Jews – to pick them up and take them to the cattle cars.

01:47:33

Q: Were you in Berlin when your mother moved to Mrs. Frankel's?

A: Yes.

Q: You were?

A: No. No. I still moved with her to Mrs. Frankel's, and my sister also. And that was just one room, you see. So, in a way, it was great to go to Berlin. In a way I said goodbye to her with the greatest of joy. She was with Mrs. Frankel. I knew she wasn't all alone. And I was looking forward – we were still thinking we'd have a life. We weren't, we weren't aware that we were all – that was the last year, or last two years of our lives. I was looking forward to being a nurse.

Q: How did your mother get along during the time when you were away? Did she...? Did she have...? There was no work.

A: She volunteered a little. She volunteered in the old age home. This was before deportation. In fact my mother was on the first train out of Munich. But we didn't know from deportation at that point. The word was unknown to us “Deportation” did that mean? And the other word – the other term that was used was “Arbeitstransport.” Those were all – there was a whole new terminology coming up that meant very little to us. “Judenrein,” “Judenfrage,²²” “Lösung der Judenfrage.²³” You know, there were “Osttransport.²⁴” What did that mean? So “Deportation²⁵” was not a word that was heard of when I left my mother. I thought she would stay there. Now, by then, – no, not yet. A little later Father got to America. And then – yes, Father already had gotten to America in '39. He was shipped out very quickly. And that was – now we're talking about 1940. Mother is alone and the letters that she writes to Father,

²¹ Jew Pure (German); Nazi term used to describe areas that had been completely purged of their Jewish population.

²² Jewish question (German)

²³ Answer to the Jewish question (German)

²⁴ East transport (German)

²⁵ Deportation (German)

which Father gave me later on so I'm very much in the picture what was happening through those letters. Now she goes to the immigration station daily, daily, daily. That was her daily work – to see if she could get out. And he in America was begging for money to buy the visa and to buy the ship's cards for the three of us. And still there was this thinking that the three of us would stay together. And then in one letter, that's like an – that's like an, like an epiphany already. In one letter she writes, and that was already very late when it was already much too late – she writes, "Siegfried, don't try to get the three of us out. Just get the children out. Forget about me," she says. So then she volunteered a little bit in an old age home. And then in 1941, when she was 45 years old, she got into Transport. By then I was in Berlin at the Jewish hospital. And then my sister also ended up in Berlin because the Gagerstrasse was closed. And for a short while we were together. And even when she goes into the transport, the last letter to my father she says, "Don't worry about me. I'll be okay. Everybody else is going too. And I'm packing all my warm clothes. And I'll see you when all this is over." Now we can talk about Berlin.

01:51:41

Q: Did you find out about your mother going on the transport soon after she—?

A: No. I found out that she was going in the transport just before she went. She called us. She had to go to a public – she had to go to the Jewish Community to use the phone. She was not allowed into a public phone. So she could call us in the Jewish hospital. We still had a phone. And then we had to call her back, pre-arranged, that she'd be at the Jewish Community in Munich. And she – first we tried to go with her. And number one, we couldn't get onto a train, we already wore the star. And, and number two, she said, "Don't go with me." She says, "There's no use. I'll work, and what's the use?" And then somehow she knew that the transport was going to Riga. That was on the 11th of November – on the ninth of November, 1941. It was one of the very first transports out of Germany. That was before, that was before the Wannsee Conference, when the killing was not really automatic yet. And still, in Riga, as I later found out, they were killed as soon as they got there. But still we hoped that we would see each other again. We had no idea that they were killed right away. When I got to Theresienstadt, I was so happy. I thought I would find my mother. I would find people again. We didn't know there was such a widespread transport system "Lagersystem."²⁶ We thought, "Well," you know, "Everybody will see each other again."

01:53:50

Q: So now your sister comes to Berlin from Frankfurt. Is that right?

A: The whole group of the Gagerstrasse Hospital from Frankfurt. First there were deportations out of there. And then when the hospital got smaller and smaller, it was closed. And the

²⁶ Camp system (German)

remaining people all came to Berlin to work Zwangsarbeit,²⁷ forced labor at the Siemens factory. To this day I can't buy anything from Siemens, believe me. So my sister was one of them. And later on that whole group went to Auschwitz. But for a short while we were together and we could see each other on our days off. We couldn't use the U-Bahn²⁸ or the City Bahn²⁹ transportation or anything. We had to walk. We had to walk with our star. And one of the thousands of laws that concerned us, that are really not well known, was that Jews could not walk in any greenery, in any park, in anything that was planted and was pretty. That was for Aryans only. So where there was a park – the Tiergarten³⁰ – and no matter what we had to walk around it. We couldn't go through it. So I remember walking and walking and walking to visit her and then walking back. And we had to be home at a certain hour, so it was very restricted. The Berlin years were difficult years. The Ansbach years were mostly happy, and the Munich years were ignorance. Dominant emotion was naiveté. What was going on we had no idea and still a lot of hope. But Berlin and our eyes were opened and all the many laws that we had to respect that Hitler made. The whole, the whole Lösung der Judenfrage – the whole deportation of the Jews was done legally. That's the ironic part. First he made a law, then he killed us. You see? But how did we know that? We knew the law and we tried to live with it. Then we already were, were very much the victims. We looked very bad. We had no more – we couldn't get clothing coupons. I remember we couldn't get coupons to have our shoes repaired. So we walked around in shoes that were ready to be thrown out. We couldn't get new ones. That's without even saying. But we couldn't get our old ones repaired either. So we had no clothes. We had bad shoes. We were not well nourished. We had the star. We didn't need the star. We marked as victims from the inside out, and from the outside as well. Where as they got better and better – well fed and more victorious, and more triumphant every day.

01:57:03

In the hospital, first I was in Niedershönhausen and then that was dissolved, and then I went in Berlin. I'm telling you how bad everything was, and yet there was that little nucleus of happiness still, you know. We were among Jews. We could talk with them. We had our own little kingdom. We had our own little hierarchy. I was just a student nurse. I was nobody, but the hierarchy went to the Head Nurse, and it was heaven when the Head Nurse was friendly with you, which was not the case in my case. I never got enough self-confidence up to talk to a head nurse, and she wasn't that much older than I was. And then, of course, there was the whole hierarchy – all the physicians that seemed like demigods. And then there was the whole god; that was Lustig – Dr. Lustig – Dr. Walter Lustig. He had two Doctors. He called himself Doctor Doctor Walter Lustig. He was a very prominent Jew before the Nazis came. He was married to an Aryan woman – to an Aryan physician woman and that was why he was saved for quite a while. I'll get back to Lustig in a minute, but as you know the Mischlin

²⁷ Forced labor (German)

²⁸ Untergrund Bahn [Underground train] (German); Subway.

²⁹ Train (German)

³⁰ Zoological garden (German)

– the Mischehe³¹ and the Mischlinge³² were a big problem to Hitler, and in fact the hospital remained in existence because of that problem of the Mischlinge and the Mischehe. They couldn't divorce. The Pope didn't allow that, and Hitler couldn't treat the Aryan person as a Jew, and he couldn't really accept the Jew as an Aryan, so he tolerated them. And it was always a... I'm sure you're familiar with the history of the Mischlinge. That was obviously a thorn in his side. And the children of those Mischlinge were also a big problem. And Theresienstadt was partly organized for those Mischlinge. They couldn't very well go into their death. After all, in many cases they had a pure Aryan father or... who was fighting for Hitler on the front. So anyway, Lustig was married to an Aryan woman and he got the job as leader of the Jewish hospital.

Q: Let's break now.

01:59:58

End of Tape #1

³¹ Intermarriage (German)

³² Mixed breed (German); Nazi term used for individuals of mixed Jewish and non-Jewish heritage.

Tape #2

02:01:00

A: It's so long ago. It still gets to me.

Q: You can see it in your eyes. You were back there. You were seeing what was happening. So that's not.... Okay. Mrs. Haas, can you talk a little bit more about what was going on with your sister at Siemens, the kind of work she was doing – what you talked about – what her condition was at the time.

A: As much as I can remember. Let's see. I was of course involved in my own work at the time? When she first came to Berlin I was still in Niedershönhausen and I remember the Head Nurse of Niedershönhausen who was a lovely old lady, whom I was very attached to, used to invite my sister on her day off to come to me because my sister lived in – they all lived together in a big room. Very Spartan, nothing there at all, just beds and a chair or what have you. So it wasn't much fun to spend the day off there. So the Oberschwester,³³ the Head Nurse of Niedershönhausen – as much as I loved her I forgot her name now, I don't recall her name – invited my sister. So my sister walked. And I remember the Head Nurse then instructed the kitchen to serve my sister and me a fried egg. Now that – need I say more? In 1940, the end of 1940, we were each eating a fried egg in Berlin. I remember how much that meant to us, and also nutritionally, my sister was very much down. They didn't have good food and they worked very hard. They did factory work. I don't exactly know what they did. She never talked about it. But in one of the letters to my mother – and then she sent it to my father – she writes that she has been chosen to be the camp nurse – that she's taking care of the little injuries, etc., etc., and that apparently was quite an advantage for her, and she was very proud of it also. And then all of a sudden they were detailed into a transport and I don't recall too much about that. I remember going to her dormitory at the Siemens factory and they had left. There was this empty big room with nothing there. There was one hat that I remember she wore and that was sitting on her bed, and I took that hat and walked back home. I don't recall my emotions or anything. I probably blocked them out and, again, the hope was that we would all see each other when we all got deported. That was always the one “glimmer” of the deportation. We always thought we would see each other again. We would also get there – like death, and you see your people again up in heaven, but that was not the way it worked – was the concentration camps.

02:04:35

Q: Was she more frightened than you?

A: I think she was a lot more realistic than I was. I, after all, lived in a little Jewish nucleus in the middle of Nazism. We were served our meals. We didn't have to go scrounging around or

³³ Head nurse (German)

go to the grocery stores, which by that time already were restricted. The Jews could only go to certain grocery stores in the city during certain hours, and buy only certain things with their rations. That was all spared to me. We got our meals served and we didn't much ask where they came from. So I was much better off. Her rations – she worked hard and I think her rations were minimal because I remember so clearly how she enjoyed that egg. So she must have had very poor food. And I don't remember too much. I remember that we wrote to my father a lot when we got together and I don't, I don't remember what we wrote, but I know what we wrote from reading the letters 30 years later and she writes – I remember especially in one letter she writes, “Kann denn niemand etwas für uns tun?³⁴” “Can't anybody do anything for us?” We had, after all by then, the major part of our family here and one part of the family in particular that moved to Argentina with all their money didn't help us at all. And I've never quite forgiven them that. They could have helped us. They had the money and we could have gone into Argentina. The quota wasn't that strict. And I remember especially from her letter, “Kann dem Tante Lina garnichts für uns tun?³⁵” – “Can't Aunt Lina” – who was the one there – “do anything for us.” So she was much more realistic than I was. I didn't write such things. I only wrote about my nursing and my friends that I made and how much I liked it, and things like that. She was much more with the times than I was. And Aunt Lina unfortunately did nothing either. That was very, very sad that my own family didn't gather around and pulled out as much as, as many as they could.

02:07:13

Q: Why do you think in the Jewish Community Hospital that you were working in, that the food was simply available and you were getting a better diet?

A: Well I think it was simply because they were a big institution and – I don't know. I never wondered. It never occurred to me to wonder. But we actually still had kosher food. That was the amazing part. That whole business with the Jewish hospital is very intriguing indeed, and I'm doing some research on it now. Up to my deportation in '43, there was a kosher kitchen in the Jewish hospital, which is phenomenal. And there were a few people, one of the housekeepers, a couple of the physicians and several of the nurses, who trotted there every meal time and got their kosher meals served, so how? I don't know where they got it from. And why the Jewish hospital remained in existence and was – never even the name changed, Das Jüdische Krankenhaus³⁶ it was called – and on Iranische Strasse³⁷ number two – and it's still there. You can still go there and see the same building – rebuilt. It was bombed out after I left. And now I haven't done the research yet, so whatever my opinions are at the moment are my own speculations. I think, number one, Lustig, Dr. Lustig was very much in with the Nazi supervision of the hospital. He was as much of a puppet as anybody else of course. And I am still friendly with one of the nurses now that was there, and she was

³⁴ Can't anyone do anything for us? (German)

³⁵ Can Aunt Lina do nothing for us? (German)

³⁶ The Jewish Hospital (German)

³⁷ Street (German)

friendly with him. And she tells of the story which I totally believe, which is completely within the context of what I remembered. She says many times she would be with him and he would answer the telephone with, "Hello. Dr. Lustig," and he would immediately put it down again. Then the phone would ring again and he would say, "Der Jude Lustig, hier."³⁸ You see. They didn't accept if he just... If they were calling him, they didn't want just "Dr. Lustig." They wanted "Der Jude Lustig, hier."³⁹ So he was a puppet. There's no question about it. Within the Jews he was all powerful naturally. He was the one that made up the lists. He was the one that put cross checks on who should go into transports of nurses, doctors, personnel, patients. He was the all powerful one. But within the context of the Nazis, he was a puppet. He was nothing. He did their doing. And if he didn't, he was the one that was punished. So, it's hard to know how to judge him. I'm tempted to judge him benevolently. Many people hated him. Many people feared him. He – of course, you know he was such a powerful man, stories build up. And I remember so well, when we first came to the hospital, we were in Niedershönhausen, student – we were 17, 18 years old. And again I have to caution you to realize what that meant back in the 30s and in Berlin we were so, so simple, so naive. And then when we were transferred to the big hospital, the rumor went that, "Dr. Lustig will inspect all the student nurses completely naked. And only the ones that he likes naked he would take in." Of course it was a stupid rumor, and it did not occur at all, but that was his, his aura. That was his reputation. He was all powerful. He could demand anything he wanted and we had to do it. But it wasn't so. He was just a very nice man. He was very powerful, yes, but also quite nice.

02:11:37

Q: Did you have direct dealings with him?

A: No, I never did. No, I never did. But the nurses that – he had many girlfriends among the nurses. And the general rule was to try to be very friendly with his girlfriends And I never managed that. And I always felt very ostracized and very badly. We lived in the nursing home and we nurses, of course, chummed together. And you have to realize I am still friendly with some of these people. My best friend – my best girlfriend whom I liked so much then, and whom I still like so much now. We're both in our 70s, but we're still like kids together – and again, an example of how naive we were. She and I roomed together in Niedershönhausen, and we were working hard. We had seven to seven shifts – seven in the morning to seven at night, or vice versa. And then after the shift we had to do our theoretical work, and we were tired. So we went into bed with each other, studied for a while, and then fell asleep just to save time. And we still chuckle over that, you know. We tell it to our husbands. And in the morning, we were woken up by the night nurses because we didn't wake up by ourselves at all – forget it – and they found us in bed together. Well, we were called before the, the Leiter⁴⁰ – I think back to German, to the German things – I sometimes

³⁸ The Jew Lustig, here. (German)

³⁹ The Jew Lustig, here. (German)

⁴⁰ Director (German)

miss my English – to the administrator of the Niedershönhausen Institution, and he scolded us, you know. But we didn't know why. We didn't know what we had done wrong. He thought we were fooling around together. That was the furthest thing from our minds. This just to show you how very naive we were. So here was that rumor we had to be undressed and we were fearful like anything, but it didn't happen. So then the next thing was we had to be friendly with the girlfriends of Lustig. And somehow she managed it and I didn't. And then we got together in the evening in our nursing dormitories and she would tell me everything – whatever was going on. They joked and they made friends and they laughed and they talked about the patients and the doctors. And I felt terrible. I never was included. And now I'm not so sorry anymore because this particular Head Nurse was not a very fine person. She then fraternized with the SS, and I'm not a bit sorry that I was not one of her friends. The SS man at the Jewish hospital was Döbberke(ph) – SS man Döbberke, and he was feared. He walked around and he would send us into transport on his own without going through Lustig. If the star wasn't sewed on nicely, or if he could smell cigarettes on our breath, or if we didn't stand up and greet him properly, or for any old reason, he would take us into transport. And I heard later on, after I left, that this particular Head Nurse from the – from the Kinderstation⁴¹ – her nurse's name was Elly(ph), Schwester⁴² Elly, she then became his girlfriend. And that was not something that sits easily with any of us. That was very bad.

02:15:35

Q: When you say that Lustig had girlfriends, you mean – you don't mean they were simply friends. You mean that they were his–

A: They were his girlfriends. They slept with him.

Q: So there were a number of nurses.

A: Yes. That was known knowledge. We didn't think much of that. We just stayed away. I mean we who were still so rural and especially we who were religious, you know, we just stayed away, you know. We had nothing to do with it.

Q: And what was your friend's name in the hospital?

A: Golly – my friend Golly. I'm still very friendly with her. She then – you ought to get her and get her story sometime.

Q: How come she became friends with these girlfriends and you didn't?

A: She was just a very – She was a Mischlinge, first of all. She was a very outgoing, lovely, very much liked person. And she was just a very sweet person. She and I liked each other

⁴¹ Children's ward (German)

⁴² Nurse (German)

very much. We were very opposite from each other. She was so blond and outgoing, and I was much more heavy and the worrying type. And we just needed each other. We were just very friendly. She didn't put much stock into her acceptance into that inner circle at all. She was a very wonderful girl and she – they liked her a lot, so they took her in.

02:17:03

Q: Could you explain the structure of the hospital. What was going on, before we get into some particular things? Was the SS man there every day?

A: I wasn't so much aware of that. I don't know. Later on, after I left, I heard that he was there every day – that he actually lived somewhere there in one of the buildings – that same Döbberke. But while I was there, the thing I remember most, we had constant visits from the SS I remember Eichmann⁴³ coming through many times – young, beautiful, smoking his cigarette, sleeked through like, like sleeked up with tongues almost – not a speck on him – and very arrogant. And we had to stand up and leave whatever we were doing and stand while he was in the room. And then he left again – just harassing us and doing what he thought was wonderful, was great, harassing the Jews.

02:18:14

Q: And how did you know that this was Eichmann?

A: We knew that. We knew that. We met him again then – he, he – you see he, which I didn't know then, he was in charge of the whole Amt⁴⁴ 4B, the whole Jewish section – he and Murse(ph), but that, you know, we didn't know that. But we just knew that he was constantly on our necks. That was his job. By then I believe the Jewish Community was already dissolved and so he had only us to play around with, and he did that job very nicely.

Q: So you're in the hospital seven in the morning until...

A: Ya. We had 12 hour duties. Then I was already a full nurse. I graduated. And then I was an employee of the hospital. In October, 1941 I got my diploma and it says on it, "Jüdische Säuglings und Kleinkinder Schwester."⁴⁵ Now I have to switch into English, "Permitted to work only with Jewish children and babies," you see. That was the restriction. I could not go out anywhere and get a job. It was just for the Jews. I still have that as a matter of fact. And then I was an employee. I drew a salary and I worked on the Kinderstation – on the baby – on the children's station, not on the baby station.

Q: And you were living in the hospital all the time?

⁴³ Adolf Eichmann

⁴⁴ Bureau (German)

⁴⁵ Jewish Infants and Toddlers Nurse (German)

A: In the hospital. And then we also had duties for a few Jewish, like daycare centers that were around the city, and we got a special permit to go to these centers as nurses and take care of the children, but they were resolved very soon afterwards. But that was part of our nursing duty.

Q: So could you explain what a day might be like?

A: As much as I remember. We got up in the morning and went to the Speisesaal.⁴⁶ We had a dormitory kind of a living where we lived and we called it der Reitsall⁴⁷ – the horses station, it was so big you know. And Golly and I roomed close together, and we had to put our uniforms on, sew on the yellow star very quickly and neatly – it didn't leave any holes in it.

Q: You mean daily you had to sew on the star?

A: Whenever we changed the uniform. We got two stars that we had to buy from the Jewish Community for zehn Pfennigs,⁴⁸ for 10 pennies, and we better take care of them. If we didn't have them, forget it, we were shot. And then we went to have breakfast, and then we started to work – whatever our duties use to be. The children were in long rows of beds and we were assigned to maybe six children that were ours that we had to take care of the whole day long. And then the doctors would come in and we had to report on the kids. It wasn't so sophisticated. Don't think we knew all that much. And then at noontime we had, I don't recall – I guess we went back to the Speisesaal for lunch, and then the inner circle always went into Schwester Elly's little room and smoked cigarettes with the doors closed. And then in the evening we went and had supper again. And we couldn't go out. There was a curfew. We had to be there at eight – back at eight. So everything that we did, we did within the hospital. And the hospital was a complex – a whole compound. So we did get out for fresh air just by walking across the halls, across the – to the different buildings. And of course there were little romances with the young physicians. Everything was so – it was so enclosed. It was so unnatural you see. It was – everything was so confined. So naturally romances sprung up and died down again, and many people left on transports, and once they were here one day and the next day they were gone. We somehow got use to that.

02:22:41

Q: Did you also have a boyfriend?

A: I was friendly with one of the physicians. I wouldn't say he was a boyfriend, but I was friendly with one of the physicians. Golly was very friendly with one of the physicians. And one of the other nurses was very much involved with one of the housekeep– one of the male

⁴⁶ Dinning hall (German)

⁴⁷ The riding stable (German)

⁴⁸ Ten pfennigs (German)

housekeepers – and finally married. There were marriages. There were marriages there. So in a way, as unnatural as it sounded, it was still a fairly normal existence. Well, I'm gonna take that back. It wasn't normal with people disappearing every day to go on transports. And then many people made secret plans to go underground. That was a big deal. And many people made secret plans to go across the border into Switzerland, and many were caught. And then also I'm going to take back what I said – that it was a normal life – because it wasn't. Because the patients we got, most of them were suicides that we had to get back to life in order so we could ship them to the collection center to be going to transports. And you know we sat and agonized over that. Is it really our duty to bring those people back to life? But, yes it was, or we were punished ourselves. The SS were always there to supervise us and do this. It was a very unnatural time, and always the fear that we would be the next ones to have the transport notice, and it was just a very bad time.

Q: Did you work on the patients who came in?

A: No. I didn't.

Q: You were working with the children–

A: But the physician that I was friendly with was somebody in charge of that, and he always told about it. And you know it was always food for conversation. What are we gonna talk about, you know, and so what could we possibly talk about? We couldn't go to a movie. We didn't know nothing of concerts, or any of the culture that normal people grow up with. We couldn't go shopping. We didn't have any new clothes to show off. What are we going to talk about? Transports and going underground, and we had no family left. We couldn't talk about family anymore, so we talked about that all the time. It was like ruminating – the same thing all the time. It was a very unnatural life actually.

02:25:19

Q: Who were the children that you took care of?

A: Those were children from the Jewish Community that were sick. And, little by little, that changed, and little by little it was Mischlinge that came in – children of mixed marriages. And then by '43 I left. And little by little the whole complex of the nurses, and the whole complexion of the staff changed too. We were replaced by Mischlinge – by people who were from mixed marriages with whom they didn't know what to do with. They couldn't put them on the lists yet. They did later. In fact, this nice Dr. Elkan(ph) that I was friendly with dumped me for a Mischlinge. I never forgot and forgave him. It was just as well. It was just as well. There was no time to form emotional bondages. And in fact I – she came to this country, too. I corresponded with her for a while. You formed such weird friendships – such weird relationships – and they lasted. They really lasted. I was very friendly with, with – not the Head Nurse, but the one that came under her. I don't know what you would call her – maybe the Assistant Head Nurse – Schwester Lea(ph). And we picked each other up again

here in this country. We had really nothing in common otherwise, but that huge balloon of memories. We could talk with each other and it was like in the comic strips, you know, over our heads was the same picture. You see? Was so weird. And then Golly would come in and over her head was the same picture, and we would talk about that. Does that give you some idea what it was like?

02:27:31

Q: It was a particular intensity.

A: It was very intense. When finally, when I got my notice, I was glad. It was like, "finally." And then an SS man came, and I was on his list, and he came to the station where I was working. It was in the middle of the day, when he told me that I was on his list. And he took me to my room in the dormitory, and everybody had their, their rucksack packed. My rucksack was packed, and he gave me just a few minutes. He timed me. And then I had to go into that van that was downstairs. And it was like, "finally," you know – "finally I can go." 'Cause I knew I would be going. I knew I wasn't going to go underground. I had no chance, and I wasn't going to do that anyway. And I couldn't get into Switzerland over the border. I was completely alone. Everybody had left already. Father was in America. Mother was in Riga – or so I thought. My sister in Auschwitz – or so I thought. And I thought I was coming to Auschwitz as well. There was no idea I was going to Theresienstadt. Everybody was going to Auschwitz – to Arbeitstransport or Osttransport. It wasn't called killing transport by any means. And so I thought I would see them all again. So I was very relieved. And I went into that transport without a minute looking back.

02:29:01

Q: Before we get on the transport, even though you brought us there, let's go back a little to the situation and how it changes in Berlin with respect to your being brought to some assembly place and selections are being done – so some people are chosen to leave – and then you keep going back to work. And what was that like? What was happening with this constantly being brought back, and then you go back to work again?

A: Are you talking about when we were called to the Jewish Community Center?

Q: Umm [affirmative].

A: Oh, that was difficult. And then Lustig was also very much involved. All these Befehle,⁴⁹ all these SS orders to do things came through Lustig. The SS never spoke to anyone else, you see. He was their man. So Lustig let it be known throughout the hospital – that was in October of '42, that – up to then it was sort of, you know, it was sort of dispersed. But now, all of sudden, it got general. It got bunched up together – that we were all going to be

⁴⁹ Order (German)

appearing the next morning at seven o'clock in full uniforms at the Jewish Community Center on Oranien Strasse . And that was a big room. We got there of course. There was no way we would not go there. It didn't occur to us not to go. That's another thing. We were so conditioned to obey. If I look at those kids nowadays, they refuse to obey their mothers, or their teachers, or their governors, or their President... It was the furthest thing from our minds not to obey an order, you see. And when I speak to students, I always encourage them to continue doing that. So we obeyed. We went in our uniform with our star, seven o'clock in the morning, the whole bunch of us, and it was a big room, and we just stood there. We didn't know why. We had no idea why we were called. Lustig didn't tell us and nobody else knew. And we stood and we stood, and it was, we couldn't go to the toilet, we couldn't get any coffee, and I'm quickly reaching for my nice cup of tea so it won't be taken away from me. We were desperate. At 12 o'clock, three SS men showed up. We knew Eichmann. He was very familiar to us. We also knew Günther.⁵⁰ He was also familiar. There were two SS Günthers – one from Berlin and one from Prague. This was Günther from Berlin. And then there were three Jews from Vienna. And then there was an SS man whom we didn't know. And of course we couldn't whisper among each other, "Who was that? What's going on?" That was completely out. And at first they didn't talk to us at all. They just stood there in front of us and smoked and laughed and joked. Very young, our age. I was 20 at that point. And then they called before them the heads of each of the Jewish departments – of each department, including Lustig who was head of the hospital.

02:32:44

And then, then first of all, that guy introduced himself. He was Brunner – Anton Brunner⁵¹ from Vienna. And he had come from Vienna with those three Jews. Then he told us why he was there, and in his own Viennese dialect, which is still ringing in my ears he said, and of course I'll say it in English, that he came to show the SS in Berlin how to deal with the Jews – how they had dealt with the Jews in Vienna. And that's why he came and brought the three Jews with him. How to deal with the Jews? We thought they had been doing fine up to now. But his innovation was – his fork in the road – was that from now on the Jews had to do the dirty work. And he demonstrated it right away. He told the leaders of each department to pick their own, to pick their own – 30 percent of each department to go into transport. He wasn't gonna bother picking anymore. He had each of the Jews pick their own Jews. And that didn't sink in right away, but after it sank in it was really ein Wendepunkt⁵² – a turning point – a pivotal point in the history of the Holocaust. From then on it was Jews stuffing Jews into the, into the cattle cars. It was Jews taking the Jews out of the cattle cars, too, and doing all the, all the agents of their own destruction they were from then on. And under that falls the Kapos⁵³ and the Jewish elders, and even we, we got white armbands. We had to go

⁵⁰ Rolf Günther

⁵¹ Alois (Anton) Brunner

⁵² Turning point, milestone (German)

⁵³ Formen (colloquial German); term used for inmates appointed by the SS to head a labor squadron of prisoners.

around helping them and we had to do our own. That was very diabolic.

02:34:43

Q: Can you explain what you mean – what it was that you had to do?

A: Well we were sent home. Somehow I wasn't picked to go into transport so I was sent back to the hospital, and a few weeks later we were sent again. We were sent three times. Yes, and then the second time – the first time he took hostages. Brunner took hostages. The first time he still let the people go home. The people had to pick their own people to go into transport and he allowed them to go home – to pack and to say “goodbye.” But he kept 20 of the high officials of the Jewish Community hostages. And he said that if not everybody would show up, those 20 people would be killed. At the time I still remembered their names and I think I wrote it into my, into my notes. I could look it up. But it's not important at the moment. And some actually did either kill themselves – some of the people who were supposed to go to transport either killed themselves or went underground, or just ran away. And he actually did kill those 20 people. He sent the ashes to their families. So we knew he meant business. And that was the same thing later in Theresienstadt. If something went wrong – 20, 200, 2,000 – were killed for one person. So that's the reason why I didn't – why we didn't think of, of objecting, of doing anything against them. We couldn't be responsible for the death of our own people. But anyway, so then we were sent back, and the second time we were sent back, he called the head of the Jewish Community before him – that was Dr. Kraindl – and Kraindl was struck by a heart attack in front of these SS people and fell dead. And he said, "Move him. Go away. Take away that dead person. Just another dead Jew." And then the third time we were told to go the Kasernen⁵⁴ – to the barracks to help with the transportation of the Jews.

02:37:11

Now that was in February of '43 during the big Fabrikaktion.⁵⁵ The Fabrikaktion was that they went into the – into those factories and took out the people who were working there who thought they were protected – who had been promised protection because they worked for the – for the military units. And they came by the thousands. They came in huge furniture vans stuffed with Jews, just they way they were from the factories – in their aprons – with their clothes – and always with the star of course. And we had to take care of them. We had... One of my friends, her name was Klara, I remember it. We were assigned to the Rathenower Kaserne in Berlin. I had never been there. We had to go there by special permit to use the public transportation. And there was this huge barrack, and the Jews were not allowed to use the toilets. That was the first thing. No food of course – no toilets – nothing. So then some Jewish people came who dug a ditch in the backyard. That was the toilet. And then finally some coffee came. But in between that we already had some thousands of Jews who were

⁵⁴ Barracks (German)

⁵⁵ Factory action (German); factory round-up.

beside themselves – direct from the factory – without their mothers or fathers or children or husbands, or anybody. That was really pandemonium in that – in those barracks. Then I remember we had to go out and take in all these people that came by the hundreds. And I remember one van opened up and blood stained people fell out. They had resisted and the SS shot them. Big deal, you know. And we weren't allowed to do anything to them – we just... We had no material anyway. So they were then shipped off too, the way they were – bleeding. And then we were... We worked there for two days straight – for three days straight, and then finally we were released from duty and some other nurses came with their white armbands and we got back. And then we went again the next three days. It was three day shifts. And then finally that Fabrikaktion was over 'cause there were no more Jews to take. That was in February, '43, and then a few weeks later I was finally taken too. I had enough by then. Now you can understand why I say it was a relief.

02:41:24

Q: You mentioned that you were wearing white armbands – the nurses, the helpers were wearing white armbands. And you mentioned that in some way, you even had to help with what the Nazis were doing in terms of getting people. What did you mean by that?

A: What did I mean by that? Well ordinarily they should have done that themselves. Why should we – we Jews – do this? That was terrible. That was the worst of the whole thing.

Q: No, I understand. That I understand. I mean, what in fact did you have to do?

A: We had to take care of them. We had to put them onto straw mattresses. We had to get the straw and put it around, and assign places to them. They didn't know what was happening. Neither did we for that matter, but at least we were told to make some order in this huge barracks. This was like a, like a military barrack. It was a military barrack. And we were in the big, big room, and we had to bring them in from the vans, and take them to a place, and say, "Now this is your place. You stay here until we come back to you and tell you what to do." They had nothing with them. They came directly from work. And we didn't know very much either, so we did the best we could. We had no food to give them for a long while. What happened was they, they begged us to see that their children would be taken care of, or their old mothers would be taken care of. But how could we do that? We couldn't leave the barracks either. So they scribbled on little notepads where to go to. But if the SS saw that they would shoot right away. So we quickly stuck them into our pockets, and afterwards we drove around and tried to help as much as we could. It was nothing that you can normally foresee. This – these Fabrikaktion involved 20,000 people that were shipped out of Berlin during those three days.

Q: You said that Lustig, Dr. Lustig, at a certain point began choosing people who would actually go on the transport.

A: Yes. That was his job.

Q: Now he was choosing inside the hospital, or–

A: Yes.

Q: Just inside the hospital.

A: Inside the hospital.

Q: What did that mean for you as nurses?

A: That any day we could be called up. That any day we would be on the list. He got us on a certain quota, which we didn't know at the time. We didn't realize that at all. We knew somehow he was involved with the SS, but just how, how the connections worked, we didn't know. After we had heard Brunner say that the Jews had to pick their own Jews, then we knew. Then it was no longer so secretive. He got his orders to choose, let's say, 500 Jews for tomorrow morning at eight o'clock. The trucks would come and 500 Jews had to be ready. So he just had to pick somebody. They weren't voluntarily going. So he probably had a quota of so many patients, and so many physicians, and so many nurses, and so many help – helpers.

02:43:52

Q: Did you, as the staff, have to help in getting people to these transports?

A: No, I didn't. I didn't. As a matter of fact, yes. When I went into the Theresienstadt transport, then a lot of the kids from the children's station also went, and I simply was put in charge of those kids. But at that point we didn't know it was a Theresienstadt transport. We only realized that when we got to the Gerlach Strasse instead of to the Oranienburger Strasse. See we knew we had to help in those places a number of times. I never did, but some of the other nur– I was sent to Rathenower Kaserne, but many of my colleagues were sent to those collection centers, and so we knew where the trains were going to from the collection centers, and I ended up at Gerlach Strasse, and I knew that was Theresienstadt. How come? How come? And then I met some of the Jewish Community personnel that I was very friendly with. Their names were Simmon – Werner and Eva Simmon – very close friends – and they were there too. The first emotion was one of happiness. "Oh, thank God I know somebody. I'm not in a sea of unknown people." But of course the next emotion was, "Where are we going?" And Werner Simmon who was an employee of the hospital – of the Jewish Community Center, said, "We're going to Theresienstadt. We're lucky" I didn't even ask how come. Who cares?

Q: Eva is the woman who had the–

A: I'm sorry?

Q: Eva is the woman who had the baby in the Hospital.

A: That's right.

Q: In the hospital.

A: I became friendly with Werner and Eva Simmon because I delivered her baby. And I just was very, very friendly with them. I walked through their house many times skirting all the greenery, and when I saw them there, what a relief.

02:45:00

Q: Tell me, how many people were, do you think approximately – were working or living in this Jewish Community Complex where the hospital was? Do you have any idea? Was it a lot of people?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you think in the thousands?

A: Yes. I would say in the thousands. It was a large, huge hospital – very many departments – very huge building for the dormitories for the nurses, and another huge building where the doctors had their little apartments. And then there was Pathologie.⁵⁶ That was a whole section in itself – a whole building – which was later, actually after I left I was told – that was later one of the collection centers too. And then there was like a house for the SS where Döbberke lived, and a whole house for Wirtschaft,⁵⁷ you know, where they cleaned and where the steam was generated, and where the laundry building was – really huge buildings.

Q: And the Jewish Community leadership was there too?

A: No. That wasn't there. That was on Oranienburger Strasse. That was also a huge complex. That was under Rabbiner Baeck – Leo Baeck. No, not always. That was first under – I think it was under Kotzover.⁵⁸ I'm not sure. I wasn't that familiar with the Jewish Community. But we always knew of and about Rabbiner Baeck, who was also a controversial figure. How much did he help the Nazis? How much did he know? How, if at all, did he protect the Jews? Those are questions that still bother me a great deal. Did they know, and if they knew what could they have done? What would they have done? They couldn't all like, like Czerniakow⁵⁹ in Warsaw, kill themselves to end this all. And he only did it because his wife

⁵⁶ Pathology (German)

⁵⁷ Trade and industry (German)

⁵⁸ Philip Kotzover

⁵⁹ Adam Czerniakow

was taken hostage. It wasn't simple. It was not a white and black situation. It wasn't a simple situation. These people had to do the Nazis' bidding. They had no way out in many cases. Their own families were taken hostages. And in many cases they thought they were helping the Jews. In many cases they thought they would deal much more kindly with the Jews than the Nazis would, and they could ease our suffering in some ways. But those are all questions that I want to research now and see if I can find any answers. But really there was no way out. There was just no way out.

02:49:06

Q: Do you think you would have wanted someone to tell you what was really going on if they knew?

A: You know we heard the word "vergasung."⁶⁰ I remember that so clearly. I almost remember the place where I sat and the person who told it to me. "Die werden alle vergast,"⁶¹ said someone to me. You know it went in one ear and out the other. What is Vergasung?⁶² How do you picture human beings being vergast?⁶³ Didn't mean a thing.

Q: Do you think if Leo Baeck had told you – not just this rumor, but a leader would have said something, would that have mattered, or would it have meant nothing because—?

A: That's a big question. That's a very big question. That's the very, very big question. If people asked him what to do he told them to go. Should he have? Should he not have? I don't know the answer. I don't know the answer. We ourselves could have refused to help in those Kaserne. Maybe we did the wrong thing too. It didn't occur to us not to obey.

Q: Did anybody refuse to help that you know of?

A: Nobody refused to help. It didn't occur to us. We were so conditioned to obey, and I think... I almost think that's how Hitler got so powerful, because the Germans too were so conditioned to obey. They always obeyed one voice – the Kaiser for years, for centuries, for thousands of years. They were always told what to do, so Hitler came and he told them what to do, so they obeyed. And we were no different. We were, we were Germans too. We were also conditioned to obey.

Q: Was that typical in a German family?

A: Yes, very typical – very, very typical. It was not a democracy. And Jewishly it was also very typical. You always obeyed. You always... And historically it was typical. The Jews were

⁶⁰ Gassing (German)

⁶¹ They will all be gassed. (German)

⁶² Gassing (German)

⁶³ Gassed (German)

persecuted before, but by laying low and by obeying – sure some were killed and some were strung up and burned and mutilated, but the Jewish Community kept them going. It wasn't the whole thing, but they were always conditioned to obey. And so you paid a little money, and you, you did something to let the cloud go over, and it always did. This was the first time it didn't work. We didn't know how to object – not as Germans and not as Jews, truly. And I really think that was part of the problem. And if people ask me if it can happen here I say, "No." The people here are conditioned to question, and conditioned to – they have an inborn common sense and they're always conditioned by hundreds of years of democracy to stand up for what they think is right. And I really don't think it could happen here. But it sure was happening there.

02:52:36

Q: Was your friend Golly – is it Golly? Was she transported out before you?

A: We went on the same transport, even though she was a Mischlinge. She volunteered. She was friendly with one of the doctors and she followed him. She married him in Theresienstadt. She's wonderful – very unusual person. She volunteered. She didn't have to go.

Q: What did you think of that at the time?

A: I loved her before and I loved her afterwards. She was just a very wonderful person. And then we went together, but then she – before she married him we roomed together, too. And then she married that guy and she went. In Theresienstadt you could live with your husband somehow if you managed it well. And then I picked up a new friend, very soon. I picked up Eva, as you know from my book. I was always very lucky with friends.

Q: When you went on a transport, you had to take care of these children?

A: We did, but there wasn't much to take care of. We had nothing to do – to give them. We had no food to give them. We had no medical equipment. We were not transported on a – in a cattle car. We were actually in a regular car – in a regular train with seats and all. So we just made sure that the kids all sat quietly and didn't cry. There was very little to do. And when we got to Theresienstadt, I still walked with them into the Ghetto, but then they were picked up and taken to the Children's Home and we were separated into – to the barracks there.

02:54:25

Q: How many kids were there on that transport with you? Do you have any idea?

A: I don't recall that. I actually had so little to do with them. Perhaps 30 – I'm gonna say 30 kids.

Q: And these were the kids who had been hospitalized?

A: Yes, those were the patients.

Q: Were they orphans, or not necessarily?

A: We only knew them as patients. It could well be that in many cases the people went underground. Many people left their children. Many people went underground and hoped their kids would get by as orphans of Germans, you see. Then they could be picked up into German – into the German sector and could be saved. And it may have been some of that. And then I don't remember much about that.

Q: Was it a difficult journey on this train?

A: No, I felt good about the journey. Remember, I was still thinking I would see my mother and my sister, and everybody. I had so many uncles and aunts, and.... My grandmother had died and my Aunt Adelheid had died, so – in Germany still. They were buried in Germany. But uncles and aunts, and all the friends that had gone before. And also remember, I was with Eva and Werner and their child. It may not sound like much, but you sucked out every little bit of enjoyment, you know. That was enjoyment. Enjoyment was measured in decimals – not in going to the Opera. No, this was fun. I was going to be together with Eva and Werner for a few hours – a few days. And I don't remember too much otherwise about the journey, just that we got there and we had to walk then from Bauschewitz to Theresienstadt. And then the children were already taken care of. Somebody took the whole group of children, and we were on our own. Then we turned and helped the older people. Don't forget there were also old patients out of the hospital, and people who couldn't walk. And then Eva and I helped the older people. And she had her little boy with her anyway who was – see he was born in '41. He was two years old. He was a little kid. And then I remember getting into Theresienstadt, and it looked all very, very foreign – very different. It was a fortress. It was a, it was a medieval fortress – an enclosure with a moat, and you had go over a bridge to get in, and you didn't see very much because there were these high walls. All I could see was the church steeple. And around, there was this huge walls. And once we were inside we could tell that along the walls, all around the ghetto in an octagon, were these barracks – these huge stone buildings, two stories high – and they were again closed up toward the street, you see. You had to go into the barracks just like you had to go into Theresienstadt to see what was inside. You had to again go into the barracks, and then you ended up like in a huge courtyard, and around you again was barracks. Can you follow this? And you could – perhaps I can, I can compare it to a monastery where you can walk all around and you still, you're still inside. You're still – always facing that huge exercise grounds. It was a military barracks where the people had to do their military exercises, you see, and you could almost watch that from every point. And we were sent into the upstairs rooms, and we were laid on straws. That was all we had. And that was our Ubikation⁶⁴ it was called – unsere Wohnung⁶⁵ – our residence

⁶⁴ Rooming space (German)

⁶⁵ Our domicile (German)

for the moment.

02:59:05

End of Tape #2

Tape #3

03:01:06

- Q: Mrs. Haas, I want to go back so that you can help us understand something. When you were at the Kaserne with helping with Klara, helping the people. They gave you little notes and you at some risk, you and Klara, went around giving these notes to parents, children.
- A: They mostly gave us their addresses 'cause they had kids at home, or old parents at home. They were taken without any notice and they were panicked. They didn't know what their kids were doing. So we took those notes, and after we were through, we couldn't follow up all of them. There were thousands of people. But the few that we did, we took the children with us to the children's station at the hospital, 'cause they were totally alone. In some cases, they were, you know, little youngsters – three, four, five, six years old – and we took them with us. And those were then the children that went on to the next transport. They were free game. It was terrible.
- Q: And these were the children–
- A: These were the transport–
- Q: that you – that you were on the transport with?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: Okay. You were describing this moat and this fortress like structure at Theresienstadt when you arrived. Now before you actually began to walk around and go wherever you had to go, there was somebody you met when you first got off the train – some young man.
- A: Yes, the helpers that were suppose to help us. And he told us a little about Theresienstadt. What did we know about Theresienstadt? Not a thing. We only knew the name. And he told us a little bit about the history and what to expect. Like, for instance, he told us about the Schleusse.⁶⁶ What on earth was the Schleusse? Nobody ever – you see, there was a whole new vocabulary that grew up as I have mentioned before, and Schleusse was one of the words that we never heard of. It was where they took everything away from us. What does Schleusse mean literally? It means a control point where you had to go through, like a toll point where you were told in which barrack you were going to live. You were given your number. Everybody had a number, and if somebody asks us... You see, any of the SS that saw us in the camp could at any time ask us to identify ourselves. He didn't want to know our name. He didn't want to know I was Gerda Schild. He wanted to know my ghetto number. What was it? “Q” – I have it somewheres – “Q 1,000” or 11, 12 something. That's what we had to memorize. And that was given to us in the Schleusse, and at the same time we were

⁶⁶ Sluice (German)

relived of most of our possessions.

03:04:00

Q: Did you have to wear this number?

A: No. We didn't wear that number. We just had to know it at all times. It was on a little slip of paper that we kept.

Q: And this person's name who was explaining...

A: Pavel, Paul – Pavel. I lost him after that. He was just one of the Czech youngsters who came and talked with me. Of course they were all very glad to have – to get out of the ghetto and have someone to talk to.

Q: Now when he first met you, you heard him say something like, "Did you have any contrabands?"

A: Yes.

Q: What was he referring to?

A: Well contraband – another new expression – was for us anything they didn't allow for Jews to possess – lipstick, money, cigarettes, chocolate, even female napkins – anything like that was called contraband. As a matter of fact, anything that belonged to a Jew was not allowed to belong to him, so most everything was contraband.

Q: And did he want some of this?

A: No. No, no. He was a nice honest guy – just a nice guy, he was really helping me. No, the Jews were alright. We didn't have any problems with the Jews.

Q: Were you treated brutally when you first arrived?

A: No, I was not. No, thank God, I was never hit or beaten or molested in any way. We always expected it and we were always on guard, but I was lucky.

Q: So how long were you waiting with this guy Pavel in this grouping to take you?

A: Well, the walk from Bauschewitz to Theresienstadt was maybe a good half hour, so he hung around me. He was probably a little attracted to me. I was still young. I was nice looking. I was not starving or I was not skeletal or anything. And I wouldn't be surprised that he was hoping to see me again later, but it was not the case. It was very casual. And then it took several hours. Then we had to sit on our knapsacks for a while in the barrack grounds until

that whole transport was absorbed and registered in and that took awhile. And then toward evening we got into the barracks. But somehow I don't think I ever saw him again afterwards. There was thousands of people, how could I?

03:06:43

Q: Did you have your own clothes?

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: They didn't take away your—?

A: No. We kept our own clothes. They took away a lot, but we could keep some.

Q: And what was the barracks like when you—?

A: The barracks were military barracks, huge rooms, straw for each person. That's how everybody first was checked in. And then we had to go into Hundertschaft.⁶⁷ Literally translated that means detail of a hundred. And it was always a hundred people that worked at a certain task. I was in the Hundertschaft of cleaning – sweeping the streets at first. You didn't get there to relax or anything. You were checked in, get into your straw, put your things down and off to work, you see. And so I swept the streets for a long time – not for too long. Then it occurred to me, and you know somebody told me all this. You weren't wise, ghetto wise right of quick. So somebody told me, "Why don't you try to get into the health system and become a nurse again." And of course that sounded like a super idea. And I applied to the Jewish self-government. The ghetto was completely self-governed, but again, just like in Lustig's case, they were complete puppets of the SS And so I applied to get into the nursing phase of the ghetto, and I was lucky. I still have my, my little notice that I could be a nurse and wear a nurse's uniform. That was wonderful. And with that came a little better food also.

Q: Is this when you met your friend—?

A: And then, yes, we were – then I could move out of those barracks. That was already a huge improvement. I was so sick of those barracks, with all these women, and there was a hostile feeling there because everybody was so – was so humiliated, and was so sad, and there was no spirit there at all. So I was already very happy to get out of that situation. And then I was detailed to the, to the home for children on Bergstrasse. And in that basement we, the nurses, could make a little nest for ourselves. The basement rooms themselves were, of course, you know very, very poor, very stark. And we had a couple of these bunkbeds – not a couple, two on each lining the wall. There were many people. And I, by sheer luck, ended up sharing my bunk with a nurse from Vienna – Eva, Eva Atlas. And apparently I attract light hearted

⁶⁷ Group of 100 (German)

people because I, myself, I'm on the serious side. So Eva was a very lighthearted, nice, round-faced nurse from Vienna, and we liked each other right away. And somehow everything is easier to bear when you have a friend. I think a lot of us who survived, survived because we had a good friend to share things with. At first, when things were very hard, Eva and I made sure that we always had a little bread. If she was out of bread, I shared mine with her. If I didn't have any more to eat, naturally it was the other way around. So that already helped. And then as our rations – as we worked harder and harder, the rations became better and better. We had what was called S-Rationen.⁶⁸ And at the moment I don't remember what the “S” stood for. Maybe for “speziell⁶⁹” – “special rations” or something. But it meant a little more bread and a little more soup, and extra coffee. And then things were not so bad anymore. And then we both had friends and admirers. And I had Jirca who worked in the bakery, and he made tiny little Gs for my first name in bread then, ‘cause I shared that with Eva too. And then things got much better. And, again, we were in a terrible situation. We were completely alone – Eva as well as myself. We had no hope for a future. We were so worried about daily calls to the Auschwitz transports. That was the big, big Sword of Damocles that was always hanging over. And yet we were young. We were 20, 21 years old. We weren't too badly off. We had a bed to sleep in. We had some food. We had some admirers. What more do you want at 21? So we kind of sailed along, and we did our work. I went a lot, by the way, to that, to that old age home that was right across the street from the nurse's – from the children's home. Because I had discovered that Frau Frankel, with whom my mother shared an – who took my mother in, in Munich – and I was able to help her out in turn a little bit with my little “G-rations” of bread. And that was good, that was good. And I met other old people there. The old people were hopeless. They had nothing to live for. And they didn't work, so they had very poor rations. So Eva and I did what we could over there after work.

03:12:31

Q: Did the old people live separate from...? How were the barracks divided, or how were the living situations divided?

A: At first everybody had to go into the barracks and lie on the floor on straw. And then the old people went into the old aged home which was miserable, miserable. The barracks were better than that. Dark and dirty and just hopeless, smelly. And that was a terrible situation. And the young people were taken to appropriate works. You see the ghetto was completely organized and taken care of by Jews. There was ghetto Jewish police and Jewish firemen, and we took care of the kids, and, of course, Jewish nurses and doctors, and Jewish street-sweepers and the whole works. And the Judenältester⁷⁰ – Eppstein⁷¹ and Edelstein⁷² and

⁶⁸ S-Rations (German)

⁶⁹ Special (German)

⁷⁰ Jewish elder (German); term used for Nazi appointed Jewish community leaders.

⁷¹ Paul Eppstein

⁷² Jakob Edelstein

Murmelstein⁷³ – three stones. Does that explain it to you?

Q: Three stones?

A: Well, all their names ended with “stein,⁷⁴” which is in German a stone. But that was coincidental. We knew Eppstein from Berlin, and it was best during his administration.

Q: Edelstein or Eppstein?

A: Edelstein – I’m sorry. Edelstein from Berlin.

Q: When you say that Eva Atlas was lighthearted, what did that mean? Did she, she laughed easily?

A: Yes. She wasn't worried the way I was. She wasn't constantly ruminating in pessimism. She lived for the moment. She had enough bread right now and she had her work, and she had me, and we could go out before the curfew. We stopped work at seven and the curfew was at eight, so we always went out a little bit. And then, I'm sure you're familiar with the history of the ghetto. By 1943 we had to do what was called “Ghetto verschönerung⁷⁵” – the beautification of the ghetto. So we got involved in that. And why was there all of a sudden this emphasis on having the ghetto beautiful and representative? As you know, there come – the International Commission came that following summer. But before the International Commission came, a German pre-commission already came. So the whole ghetto suddenly was buoyed. We were suddenly involved in sowing grass and planting flowers – and painting the houses and sewing curtains to put into only the downstairs where this commission could walk by. So we suddenly, in our little basement room, we had a little curtain. And then there was cultural beautification as well. Suddenly the SS allowed, and not only allowed, but ordered the Jews to sing and dance, so to say, as their little puppets on a string. But we didn't look behind that. We just knew we could sing again, and walk around, and look at the flowers – and that's what we did. And Eva, who had a very nice voice, was taken into the choir, and so she had a pass past the curfew to rehearse in the choir and I always went with her. And so she rehearsed the *Elijah* another, another phenomenon of Theresienstadt. The *Elijah* is an oratorium which, first of all was written by a Jew – Mendelssohn⁷⁶ – secondly, the context is Jewish. It speaks of that glorification of God, who is – who punishes the wicked, you see – who doesn't give fire to the sacrifice of the Baalites, and he punishes them in the end, and they have to go and disappear – and elaborates and honors, and rewards the Jews – Elijah and the Jews. How they ever allowed this in the ghetto, I will never know, but I didn't ask any questions. I went and heard Eva sing in the choir, and the melodies are still very much with me. So that was Eva. She took what came.

⁷³ Rabbi Benjamin Murmelstein

⁷⁴ Stone, rock (German)

⁷⁵ Embellishment (German)

⁷⁶ Felix Mendelssohn

03:17:19

Q: Now you and Jirca would go and listen to the rehearsals I gather, and then walked back.

A: Yes, we went to rehearsals. And then we also went to when she really sang. It was performed – the rehearsals were before the Commission, and then it was performed during the Commission, along with a lot of other things. And we took part in all of it. I saw *Tosca*, and I saw *Carmen*. And you must understand that I saw and heard this with the most magnificent voices there was. The Jewish – the top – the cream of the Jewish voices had come to Theresienstadt. The best of the Jewish musicians – of directors and conductors and everything. And we heard that. Of course it wasn't elaborate. It was in some attic room in that ghetto close. But the voices! I still can't take a mediocre voice because in my youth I heard these magnificent sounds, and that stayed with me. And those people, after they were done singing, went behind the (Inaudible) to the transports. That was the bad thing. But we didn't worry about it so much anymore then. We just lived for the moment. We just lived for that evening when we could go and hear that and enter a new world – a world of sound, and music, and voices – the human voice. That was nice. So we enjoyed that. And very soon Jirca went on transport too, and Eva and I stayed. I don't know why. Miracle, just a miracle.

03:19:10

Q: There were orchestras and chamber music as well, right?

A: Yes. Yes. They had confiscated a lot of the musical instruments from Prague, and if they missed anything they went to Prague and took it – the SS. And then the Jews were ordered to rehearse a certain piece Smetana's, *Bartered Bride*. Ah, heaven! And a lot of Smetana⁷⁷ and a lot of Dvořak⁷⁸ – *The New World Symphony*. They were sitting on a stage, on a podium, in the middle of the square, in the middle of the ghetto, in the middle of Nazi Germany. It was absurd. It was bizarre. And if we had thought about it, we would have gone mad. But we didn't think about it. We just walked by, arm-in-arm, and listened to that heavenly music. Not even knowing that after the concert these people would all be shipped out – or after the Commission left. Even before the Commission left, because the ghetto was overcrowded – hugely overcrowded. The ghetto always remained at 50,000, but it wasn't the same 50,000. It was a constant new transport coming in and thousands and thousands of people being shipped out. So we were just lucky. We were never called to go into transport. And during the pre-commission, the ghetto was overcrowded. There were probably 60,000 or 70,000, and they couldn't show the Commission an overcrowded ghetto, so they shipped out tens of thousands of people before the Commission came. And Jirca was in one of those transports.

Q: Before?

⁷⁷ Bedrich Smetana

⁷⁸ Antonin Dvořak

A: I think so. I think so, because Eva and I went alone to hear all these operas. Yes, I'm quite sure he was shipped out before. And then the Commission came, and then after that they filmed all this, and after that there was no more music. Then everybody was transported.

03:21:25

Q: So this culture stops after the Red Cross Commission comes?

A: It went on a little bit more, but the enthusiasm and the purpose was gone.

Q: Were you filmed when that film was being made of that—?

A: I'm not sure I was in the film, but the film was done. I remember that. I was part of the deception while the Commission was there. I don't remember what Eva did. She may have been with me. I don't recall that, but I recall that I was detailed behind a hay wagon, and I was told to put a little kerchief around my hair, and I got the rake over my shoulder. And behind that filled up hay wagon, which we'd never seen before, we were walking – a group of us girls were walking and we had to sing. I'm sure Eva was with me, too, because she had such a nice voice. And we walked by the Commission, out of the ghetto, and in by the next gate, and then we were dissolved again 'cause the Commission had passed. It was all – all just a show. But we didn't know, and we didn't care. If we had any character, we would have refused to do that. It didn't occur to us.

Q: Now in your book you say that some people did refuse and they put them in a room for a few hours.

A: Yes. Yes, some people did refuse, especially the Danes the Danish Jews. They had a lot more spirit than we did. They were very different from us. And also, you see, we already had ten years of Hitler and most of them didn't. They were still fresh from their King, and from the authority of their King who was standing behind the Jews.

Q: Can you repeat what you were saying about the Danes? You said the Danes were different than you.

A: Ya. The Danes were different. First of all they, they were treated differently. They lived in houses and they didn't have – I don't think they had to work. I'm not sure on that now. And I had one Danish girlfriend – one girl, Danish friend. I don't know how I got her, but somehow I was friendly with one of them. And she was very outspoken. And she said that she would tell the Commission that this was all just a farce, a comedy, a Potemkin Village. And she was taken into custody during the time of the International Commission. And when she came out again, she told us she was together with a lot of other people who were outspoken, and with a lot of people who looked very Jewish. And the explanation was later that they were taken into this custody not by the SS, but by the Jewish ghetto governments because they

were afraid of any repercussions. And if anything had gone on the whole ghetto would have been severely punished.

03:24:43

Q: What did you think of her actions at that time when she said that she was going to tell them the truth?

A: I admired her. I didn't have the guts to do that. It didn't even occur to me to do that. You were told to do something and you did it. It was such a, it was such a different mentality. I don't even understand it myself anymore today. But it really didn't occur to any of us to do that. I wished I could, I wished I could have a simple, clean explanation for it, but I don't. It was the whole business of – It all dragged after me – that whole 10 years of Hitler, and even before. My whole 2,000 year history, that was all in me.

Q: Could you explain your characterization of the barracks when you were in there with all these women, and you said there was – there was hostility – in the barracks? Could you explain more of–?

A: Yes, I'll try. I wasn't in the barracks for too long. I would think there was a very bad feeling, already on my part. I had come to Theresienstadt actually with great expectations. Right away I was disappointed. Where's my mother? Not here. My sister? Never heard of her. All my friends? Zero. So already my mood was very down. Then I get stuck into – I get separated from Eva Simmon – from my friend, from all the kids, from all the people I knew, from Golly also. Golly was with me for a while, but we weren't together in – on the straw at all. She was somewhere else. And then these women, these were all older women whom I've never seen before. And they were wrapped in their grief – in their separation from their families. It just was no camaraderie there whatsoever. And I felt lonely, and maybe the hostility came from me, but I could not form a friendship on that straw there at all. And, I repeat, it's very important, in a situation that we were in, to have a friend – to have someone to share things with.

03:27:12

Q: Was your friendship with Eva typical or deeper than what you saw around you? Or was it common that people had very close ties with one person or two persons?

A: That's a question I never asked myself. But as I think back, I would say it was not unusual to form a very close friendship. What else did we have? That was all that was allowed to us – a personal friendship. And I would say it was not too uncommon. I could observe it looking back now. In that room where we then lived, in that basement, and where we worked upstairs with the children, most of the other inhabitants were Czech nurses, Czech girls. Because we were, after all in Czechoslovakia. And, looking back, they were very tightly close together. And there was a bit of a gulf between them and us. They considered

themselves in their own country, and we were the newcomers. So we didn't form friendships with them at all. But they formed friendships with themselves.

Q: When you think back, do you think that women had different sorts of friendships than men, or there's not a gender difference here?

A: It's hard to say. I'm sure there were male-female friendships as well. First of all, as I mentioned before, marriages were permitted, and my friend Golly very soon married the man that she had followed, and then lived with him in a small little room somewhere – even just in a corner of a small room. It was not a luxurious way of living. So there was male-female relationships throughout the ghetto, and I would think, yes, there were friendships either way.

03:29:17

Q: No. I would have asked you that question, but I was also asking a question about male friendships with other men.

A: Oh. I wasn't aware of that. No. I was not aware of that.

Q: So you were separated from – the men were living separately from the women, except for those people who were—?

A: Yes. Yes, that's correct. Oh, definitely. No, I was not afraid of – I was not aware of same sex friendships. You know that was very, very taboo. Number one in the Jewish Religion, and number one in Germany. Hitler killed homosexuals. The list of hate was Jews, homosexuals, blacks and then everybody else. But that was not allowed. Ah, forget it.

Q: No, I actually wasn't referring to sexual relations now. I really meant the friendships that were like the friendship you had with Eva, because you're talking about a relationship that helped you to survive, right?

A: Yes.

Q: And I was wondering whether you saw, among men, a similar kind of pairing of, you know. And were the pairings among men and women that weren't marriage, for instance, that were love affairs, were they always love affairs, or was that because the men had access to things that the women needed? In other words, were they not always just straight forward not that love is straight forward? Do you know what I mean?

A: I don't quite see what you're asking me. Are you asking me if the kind of friendship I had with Eva, I could also observe between two men?

Q: That's one question.

A: Yeah. I'm wondering if I'm at all able to answer that because I had no insight into where the men lived, but I would think "yes." I would think they formed very close camaraderie as well. How else could they survive? So I would think the question of that must be "yes," but I wouldn't know from any personal experience. Now what was the other part of the question?

Q: Well, I'll ask it in a balder – in a balder way. Was there prostitution in Theresienstadt?

03:31:50

A: That's a good question, and I have often been asked that. I did not observe it while I was there, but since then I have read a lot about it. But I don't think that there was because the Nazis were strictly forbidden to fraternize with the Jews – strictly. And if anything like that occurred, it wasn't only the Jew that was punished, the Nazi was punished as well. But I have since then heard so much of that, that I'm wondering if I was just not aware of it. But I don't think so. It certainly wasn't so that I could observe it. The Nazis and Jews were strictly separated.

Q: How about among Jews?

A: How about what?

Q: Among Jews?

A: Sex among Jews? I would think "yes." I would think that went on. We were not in a situation like Auschwitz, and also we were healthier. And fairly – there were babies born in the ghetto. So that – so my answer is "yes."

Q: Did they survive?

A: Yes. They came to us to the home. We took care of them, with their mothers. The mothers nursed and the fathers came to visit, so I would say "yes." There was a normal life there.

Q: Do you think these were pregnancies that occurred prior to arrival in Theresienstadt, or were people well enough you think...

A: Both. Both. Many came pregnant from their homes – from their original homes – very many, and I would think... Also, officially, pregnancies had to be terminated, and were in the whole Elbe Hospital. But yes, I think we had some babies there that were....

Q: So there were abortions that were forced?

A: Absolutely. That was... They were ordered.

Q: And the Judenrat carried that out. There was no...

A: No. There was no question – no problem.

Q: Did you ever have to participate in any of these?

A: No. I was not in that part of the health system. I was with the product – with the nurses with the babies. We got quite attached to some of those babies. And that's how I met Jirca. He was the brother of one of the nursing mothers there, you see. Otherwise, I don't think I would have known him. And, you know, we were both young, and we went on walks together. One thing I remember so much from Theresienstadt is we got such a love and appreciation of the stars, of the firmament. You know that was one of the few things we were allowed to do. We could look up and look, and he knew the stars very well, so he gave me a lasting appreciation of constellations, and of planets, and first magnitude stars, and I was very happy about that.

Q: Wasn't there a situation where he took you to – he was ringing church bells?

A: Yes. And then, during the International Commission, and already before, they decided that the town would look more normal if that, up to then dead, clock up on the church tower would spring to life. And somehow, I don't know why, he got the job of winding up that clock, and he took me with him a couple of times. And that was a permanent event in my life. I can still see every steep step that I climbed, I climbed up there. And as I got higher and higher, how the fragrant air came through that opening, 'cause there was nothing – it was open, you see, on the top, and how that wonderful air from the surrounding countrysides.... The ghetto of course had always bad air, also many people, and there was nothing to give air to. And here I came up this was this – and then the view – and he could see Prague in the distance. I couldn't, but I think he kind of hoped he could see Prague. That was his home town. But I could see the Elbe and the Eger. That was wonderful blue rivers, unpolluted, and I can still remember how I wished I could swim, and how I almost felt the cool water on my shoulders. We hadn't been swimming since I was a child, you see. And I can still remember how I dreamt that I could dive into that water and feel the water go over my shoulders. And then we heard bird sings. But also as we looked at the beautiful things, we also saw die Kleine Festung.⁷⁹ One of the features of the ghetto was what was called "die Kleine Festung." That was – you see, Theresienstadt was a garrison town built in the 1600s or the 1700s for soldiers, and naturally they had to have like a correction place for soldiers that needed to be punished, and that was die – a medieval fortress – a medieval, almost like a torture fortress, where they put the soldiers that needed to be isolated. And they recovered this again from medieval times and put the Jews in there. Took terrible consequences. The Jews there were – were never returned. It was also, by the way, a historical place. The young man by the name of Gavriilo Princip who shot the Crown Prince in 1914, and started World War I in Sarajevo – I say "Sarajevo" – You say it differently, don't you? How do you say it? Sarajevo. Sarajevo, which is so much in the news now. That how World War I started as you

⁷⁹ The little fortress (German)

probably know. It was called, "the shot that went around the world." That young man – that young Princip was imprisoned in the Kleine Festung, and then he died just before the end of the war, and he's buried outside the Kleine Festung. So it has a very historical side to it. So this is what we saw from up on the tower and I only, reluctantly, always, went back down into the ghetto after he took me up there.

03:38:47

Q: It was more than once.

A: I think it was a couple of times. It kind of kaleidoscoped into one because each time it was such a wonderful experience. It think it was maybe two, three times. And he was, naturally, not allowed to take me up there, so by the time we came down into the, into the ground floor again, he always had to look out first that no SS was around and then he could sneak me out. We took pleasure where we could.

Q: So there's always this combination of the background being so sad and deprived, and yet–

A: Yes. I always feel a little guilty because I did not go through that terrible hell that so many of other Jews went through. I never was in a gas chamber. I was never in real danger of my life. I was, of course, constantly, 'cause all the time those transports would go out – and I survived. And I that's – I think part of why I'm still religious – I did survive. Miracles did happen.

Q: Let me ask you a couple of other things. Did you menstruate in the ghetto, or did it stop?

A: It stopped. It stopped. We were so worried when they took our, our napkins as contraband in the Schleusse. And of course, by the way, those were not these elegant little contraptions that young women use today. It was something that we used, had to wash out afterwards, and used again. And we were so worried when it was... when those were taken from us, and then we didn't need them for which reason I don't know. And it impacted us differently. Some of us became very heavy and very fat, and others became very thin after we lost our menstruation – and I kind of got a little thin and Eva got a little heavier – I don't know why.

03:40:47

Q: Tell me about Freddi Hirsch. What was your relationship with him?

A: Nice. I met Freddi when I was still in the Hundertschaft because I was detailed to sweep in front of his home – his children's home. He was the leader of the children's home. He was already a prominent Zionist before, and he attracted the young people around himself. And then when he got out of the Hundertschaft, he was detailed to the children's home to work with the children. It was of course forbidden to have classes or real instructions, so he always was able to lead and guide and instruct the children kind of on the sly. While they were

supposedly working, he would give instructions, and he was very much beloved. He was a very lovely young man – a real Zionist – a real ethical figure. And the Germans respected him for a long time, and then the reason he got into the next transport was – yes, I remember that. A transport of children from Czechoslovakia showed up – from Slovakia showed up – alone – barefoot, in terrible condition – and we heard about it. And they didn't speak anything but Polish, and he of course spoke Polish. And we... Eva went as a nurse to that transport also. I didn't. I don't know why. That was the one time we didn't do things together. That transport was a group of children whose parents had been shot, and these children had witnessed that, and they were very frightened – very intimidated. And the order came from the SS that we were not allowed to speak to them. We were not allowed to know that their parents were shot and killed, and the kids, not speaking any other language but Polish, were not permitted to speak to us who spoke German. So Freddi Hirsch disobeyed that order and spoke to the children in a soothing way, and he was caught at that, and he was, of course, put onto the next transport. And he wrote a card back that I remember. After some time he wrote back that... First for a long time we didn't hear from him, and then he wrote back, "We should do all we can to stay in the ghetto and not to volunteer and not to provoke our entrance into an east transport." And we were puzzled about this because we thought we had it very bad. We had no news from Auschwitz. We did not know how bad they had it, and so we, we got our first inkling how bad Auschwitz must be if he advised us to stay where we are.

03:44:09

Q: So you heard no – did you continually hear rumors about gas chambers, or did they stop?

A: That stopped. I heard that once in Berlin, "Die werden alle vergast." And I thought that guy was out of his mind to make such a statement, and then we didn't hear it anymore. We didn't hear it anymore. We heard only that they were working, and they couldn't write for a while they could write, but only for a while. And I never heard from Eva and Werner Simmon. I surely would have heard from them if they had lived. And when Golly was deported to Auschwitz, or rather when she followed her husband to Auschwitz, I didn't hear from her. So, there was something fishy going on and we knew it. But also we – I think we purposely closed our minds to it. We purposely – because we were so apt to go into the next transport, and why should we think we were going to be killed right away So, self preservation, we took that out of our minds.

Q: And who was choosing the people to go on transports? Also the Judenrat?⁸⁰

A: Yes. I have to assume so. Yes.

Q: You're not sure?

⁸⁰ Jewish council (German); term used for Jewish administrative boards appointed by the Nazis to oversee Jewish communities and ghettos.

A: I'm not sure, but... Yes, of course it was the Judenrat. I am sure, because when the October transports – the one that Jirca went on, just before the Commission. Then all of a sudden Edelstein was taken prisoner, and his wife was told to bring food three times a day, and to bring fresh clothing once a week. And she never got any – any dishes back, and she never got any dirty laundry back. He was, as we know now, he was already in the Kleine Festung and probably already dead. And the reason was that he did not want to cooperate in those transports. He refused to put that many people up for transports. So the answer to your original question is “yes.” It was the Jews who made the transport. Of course it had to be. The Germans didn't do it anymore. Why should they? And it was the Jews who worked in the Schleusse. The Schleusse of course went both ways – in and out. And who took the people to the cattle cars and everything else? Thank God I never had to do that. I only went to all the incoming transports to see if I would find anybody I knew. And, in fact, by then the trains came right into the ghetto. And there was a certain barrack where we could go to and just look out the window and see the people come. Eva and I did that. We watched to see if we knew anybody.

03:47:20

Q: When the people worked in the Schleusse, do you think they stole things?

A: Yes, I would think so. I would think so. I would think so. I don't think they considered it stealing 'cause–

Q: No, no–

A: 'Cause it was that – it was already stolen in the first place.

Q: I didn't mean that in the derogatory sense.

A: But I think so, yes. And then they could do a little good with it. And then often they would exchange these things for cigarettes. Cigarettes were very coveted. Everybody wanted to smoke.

Q: Why?

A: Don't ask me, I never smoked, and I never touched a cigarette – or maybe I touched one once or twice – but they loved cigarettes. I think it got them away from the ghetto. I think it made them feel normal again.

Q: And why didn't you smoke?

A: I never did.

Q: Did Eva?

A: No. Never. No. It wasn't done. At home nobody smoked. It never occurred to me to smoke. Maybe I did once or twice, and I think I was very sick afterwards, so I never did it again. I still don't smoke.

Q: What was your food like? What was your daily--?

A: The food. When we came in, as our belongings were taken away from us, we got in return one little thing – one little pot kind of a thing out of metal, that we had to hook onto ourselves – and not to lose it, because we didn't get a second one. If we lost it, we just didn't get any food. So we hung onto it for dear life. And three times a day, while we were still in the Hundertschaft – in the beginning – three times a day we went to the Essensausgabe⁸¹ – the distribution center for the food. And in the morning we got coffee, and they called it eine⁸² buchta⁸³ – was kind of a square shaped piece of bread. And at noontime we got soup and bread, and a little margarine, I think. And in the evening we got soup, and a little sugar, and coffee. And that had to do us. And maybe a little bit bread again. But then when we worked in the children's home, then the food came to us already. It came into the home and it was much better then.

Q: Was it prepared in the home, or was it already prepared?

A: No, no. There was one central station that did all the food.

Q: And so there was a difference between the kind of food certain groups got and other groups.

A: Only in the way that it was a little more that we got. A little more volume, quantity. And these places where they distributed the food, mostly the old people had to go because they had no place of work. The people who worked – I have to assume – that it was the same as in the children's home – that the food was brought to them, rather they stopping their wor.... Of course, it had to be that way 'cause the Germans wouldn't allow the people to wander off at noontime and go to lunch, huh? That wasn't done. So I have to assume, then the food came in a little better quantity. And later on, during and after the Commission, there was also better quality. There was sent much better food. I remember my agony when I saw for the first time some meat swimming in that soup. Up to then there was no meat. It was just – Eva and I always compared it to, to the dishwater that we threw out after washing our dishes. You know, a little, little eyes of fat swimming on it, like it was from our dishes at home when we were still living normally. And then suddenly I found a piece of meat in there and I didn't know what to do because I hadn't eaten meat up to then. In the hospital, in Berlin, up to – after I left was kosher, and up to then there was no problem, and suddenly I was

⁸¹ Food distribution (German)

⁸² A (German)

⁸³ Baked yeasted dumpling (German)

confronted with a piece of meat, and I remember my agony. "Should I eat it, or shouldn't I?" Eva had no such qualms because she was never kosher, and she ate it of course.

03:51:45

Q: What did you do?

A: I ate it too, but after a long struggle. And it didn't taste good. I was sorry I ate it. It was probably horse meat and I shouldn't even have touched it.

Q: Did you feel guilty?

A: I didn't feel guilty, but I felt sorry. And Eva said, "You have to keep your strength up, and you have to eat it," and this and that, but I shouldn't have listened to her. I did okay without the meat. I think I didn't eat it a second time. But I remember that so well because it was such a such an opening into decision making all of a sudden. Up to now you didn't have to make any decisions, and all of a sudden you.... That was the first important decision, and then the next important decision was to go on the Swiss transport or not.

03:52:47

Q: Can you give an impression of sanitary conditions?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Water, toilets – I mean, what were those conditions like in Theresienstadt?

A: Yes. I can give you a very clear picture of that. When we were still living in the barracks, at first – and you mustn't think that after I left, everybody else left in the barracks also. Oh, no. The barracks were always constantly filled with newcomers. Every newcomer first had to stay in the barracks for quite a while, so it was very filthy there, very, very filthy. And it was like some toilets for the whole barracks. It was directly taken over from when they used it as military barracks, so whatever it was, that I don't remember that too well. It was just, you know, very primitive. This was 1940ish and there was not very great luxury.

Q: Like a latrine, or was there actually running water?

A: There was no running water. I think it was a latrine. Yes, I believe it was. You see that was not so strange to me because in Ansbach, way back when I was a child, that's all there was. So it was not a culture shock that if somebody would have to go there today – you know – it was the outhouse. It was where we went, you see. Just Berlin was much more elegant there. We had a real toilet. But, so I was back in my youth – so what? But in the home for the children, when Eva and I lived in the basement, I remember very well the way we showered and the way we washed our hair, it was just a low faucet, and we had to kind of crouch under

it when there was warm water, or even had cold water. And I remember Eva and I washing our hairs, each other, 'cause she doesn't remember all of that. I have to tell her again and again how I washed her hair and she washed my hair. And I remember that clearly, but about the toilet I don't remember. I think we had running water in the home already. You see those things didn't stay with me because, you know, it was something that just had to be done, and you did it, and it didn't stay with me. I think we had a running toilet, although I'm not positive.

03:55:16

Q: And what about soap and shampoo, and where did you get them?

A: Soap? We had soap. We had some primitive soap, like Waschseife⁸⁴ – these big bars that were given to us. We had to have soap because we washed the children also. In the home it was clean. Now you asked about sanitary conditions. We had, we had to keep that basement room clean, naturally. There was no maid service. And we had to wash our own things in that little faucet. But the big, big problem in Theresienstadt were the bedbugs, and we could not rid ourselves of the bedbugs ever. In the summer, no matter how we tried to keep the beds clean, or anything – naturally we didn't change beds all that often 'cause we had to wash the bedding under that little water and hang it out to dry in the winter. I don't think we ever changed beds. So we had enormous problem with bedbugs – the whole ghetto. And in the summer we just took a blanket and slept outdoors. And there again it was always that beautiful sky. There were no lights to interfere, you see. The whole, the whole ghetto was blacked out – number one because they wouldn't spend any of the – any electricity on us, and number two, it was wartime. We had to be blacked out. We couldn't attract enemy fire. So we slept outdoors under that gorgeous sky. And once in a while the ghetto, house by house, would be de-debugged, and it didn't do a thing. After a week or two the bugs were back. So that was a really big problem. We scratched and scratched, and then those things got infected, and it was a mess. There was nothing we could do, no matter how we tried. And you asked about the water. I have no recollection of it. It was probably drinkable. I don't recall.

03:57:27

Q: You don't remember if you were thirsty?

A: No, I don't remember feeling thirsty. I think once we were in the home there was always water because of the children. We took very good care of those children, and I remember how strict we were with, with the mothers to keep their children clean, and not to bring in anything, 'cause there was always lice and bedbugs.

Q: Okay.

⁸⁴ Washing soap (German)

03:57:55

End of Tape #3

Tape #4

04:00:05

Q: Mrs. Haas, can you tell us something about the hospital and the children, and what you and Eva and the other nurses were doing.

A: The children's home. It was not a hospital.

Q: The children's home.

A: The children's home. Yes, I can recollect that very well. We had from babies to – I would say, two years old. Now these were children that came in transports. A lot of them were of mixed marriages – the so-called Mischlinge that the Germans didn't know what to do with. These were not necessarily sick children. This was a regular children's home – babies' home – for which I actually was trained. That was my diploma. And we, we took care of them as best we could. For instance, I remember we had to wash the diapers out all the time. You know, naturally, I mean what do you expect in the '40s in Germany? And hang them up to dry and use them over and over again. And the children stayed with us day and night. The mothers could come and visit. In some cases they nursed and came three times a day, but in most – in all cases they had to work otherwise, and just came to visit their kids. And I remember we were fairly strict with those mothers. We didn't let them – we were the bosses, not the mothers, you see. We told them when they could take up their kids and not. We were always afraid they would bring in lice, or bedbugs, or disease, or whatever – and these were our kids and we were keeping them nice and clean and healthy. We had a physician coming, I don't know how often now. But if one of the kids were sick we sent them to the hospital. And we worked very hard. We had to do everything. We had to clean the rooms, do the washing, we had to feed the kids. The food came in. We didn't have to cook it. So it was an all around job. And we – in some cases when we got very attached to the children, it was terrible when they were called on transport. And then after a while we hardened against this. We tried not to get attached, but that's hard to do.

04:03:30

Q: I can't imagine if there was a mood over all the children, but can you describe something of what went on with the children and your actual interactions with each other?

A: I remember we took them out into that little park. Just in front of the home – just in front of Bergstrasse 14 there was a little park, just a little enclosure where there were greenery and a couple of trees. And I remember we took them out into that park. We dressed them up warmly if the weather was warm, and that was always so nice. We could sit in the park for a few minutes watching our kids, but really we were sitting in the park – and just to get them some fresh air and some normal activities. Otherwise, we didn't do anything with them. They slept, and were fed, and were cleaned, and bathed, and slept again. That was all we did. We

couldn't do anything with them. Later on when the Commission came, then they built in that same little park, playgrounds, and swings, and rockinghorses, and everything. And we had to instruct the kids what to do with them. And then the kids in turn, these were the older kids, were instructed to play act – that they were always playing on these things.

Q: What is the age range of these children in the home?

A: The age range?

Q: Yes.

A: From newborn to about three.

Q: So, there's not a lot of –?

A: After they were three, then they got into that home that Freddi Hirsch was, was – or maybe four I would think. No, we didn't keep them 'til four. There must have been another in-between step, because Freddi's children were also already much older. I think there was an in-between step. We had the small ones, and he had already the trainable ones. There must have been one other step in between, but at the moment I don't know what it was.

Q: Did they cry a lot?

A: No. They were happy. They were cute. They were kids. What always surprised us was how healthy they were. And also what surprised us was that the mothers could even produce kids. The mothers themselves were dehydrated and undernourished, and they produced perfectly nice kids. No, I would think those kids were okay. They didn't know. They went into their deaths without ever knowing.

04:06:31

Q: Did you – did you try not to be affectionate with them so as not to get close to them, or was that not a –?

A: At first it wasn't a problem. At first we were very close to them, but don't forget they had mothers. We didn't need to be that close to them. And later on we tried not to be, not to be in love with them at all, 'cause we knew they were going. Later on, as the transports escalated, they were going as quickly as they came in, and then we didn't go too close to them anymore.

Q: Do you think that affected the children? Did they notice? Or was the turnover so great –?

A: No. I don't think it affected the children. We still gave them all the care we wanted to, we needed to, but we just didn't let our hearts go out to them. They were cute kids. It was

terrible. That whole Theresienstadt was just another collection center, and it took us a while to realize that. It was just another center to go to your death. And some, of course, died there too. The old people died easily. And some of the children died too – and some of the other people. Disease, malnutrition, severe depressions. I don't think there were many suicides. At least I wasn't aware of it. I wasn't aware of suicides.

04:07:38

Q: But in Berlin there were a lot of suicides.

A: Pardon?

Q: In Berlin there were a lot of suicides.

A: Yes. In Berlin was a lot of suicide. I was not aware, maybe I was just not aware of it, I can't tell you of any suicides in Theresienstadt. No, I remember. And anyone who died was burned, and the ashes were put into little bags, and then – I was in that building once. I don't, I don't remember why. It was – you see, those, those walls that surrounded the ghetto were hollow inside, you see. You could walk into them. Those were huge walls – huge medieval walls. They were hollow inside, and on top of them there was earth, and there was grass. That was called die Bastei.⁸⁵ And later on you could plant vegetables up here, and you could walk up there and have a ballgame up there. But what I'm thinking, at the moment, these urns, if you want to call them urns – it was just in little paper bags with a name on them, were stored in those – between those huge walls. And for some reason or other I was in there once. I don't know why or how I got there. But I remember being there and seeing those rows and rows of – of little packages with ashes. I have no recollection how I got there. And then, after a while, there were so many that the SS ordered the Jewish government to dispose of them. And then they put them onto a barge, and the barge was taken out into the River Elbe and was sunk. So a lot of people's ashes are sunk in the River Elbe.

Q: Was there a crematory to burn the bodies?

A: Sorry?

Q: Was there a crematory in Theresienstadt to burn the bodies?

A: Yes there was. I don't know where it was, but yes there was. Ya. And after we left there was another crematorium being built – actually before we left already. There were rumors that a crematorium was being built, but then we left and I don't know what became of it.

Q: Did you dream?

⁸⁵ The bastion (German)

04:10:00

A: In Theresienstadt?

Q: In Theresienstadt?

A: No, not that I remember. I don't recall. It's a good question. I don't think so. Eva and I fantasized a lot. Eva and I, in our spare time, we, we built some huge dream castles. We called it – first of all we talked a lot about food 'cause we were always hungry, and we gave it a name. We called it “Magenonanie.”⁸⁶ It's really a name we made up. “Magen” is your stomach. So it was “Stomach-Onanie,” and “Onanie” is masturbation. So we had a very nice time masturbating our stomachs with dreams of food. Of all the things we had eaten, and all the things we're going to be eating again. And that satisfied us for the moment. I think we made up that name. I've never heard it before or since. And then we also dreamt that we would get out. That kept us going. We always dreamt that we, we would survive all this. We were hoping that we wouldn't get into a transport. If we would go into a transport, we knew that was the end. But we were hoping very.... And the big question was if one of us would go into a transport, would the other one voluntarily go along? And we kind of didn't make a decision on that, and thank God it never came up. And then we dreamt that we would get out, and get married, and find love. You see, we were by now 22, 23. Love was not a thing we were very familiar with, aside from these flirtations and these.... You know, somebody once brought me a bunch of flowers that they had picked up on the Bastei, that, that was the height of courtship. You know, that was fabulous. I still remember it, and the smell of them, and the look of them – and just the whole gesture of receiving flowers, you know. So anyway... So we dreamt we would lead a normal life, and have husbands, and have children – and then we let our fantasy go wild, and we said, "And then our children will marry." And we promised ourselves our children would marry each other. And, as you know, it did become true. My son – my daughter and her son married, but not because we wanted it to. I was so surprised when my daughter called up and said, “Joe and I are engaged.” I was the most surprised person in the world. Also, 30 years before that, Eva and I had dreamt about it. That was one of the miracles of my life.

04:12:52

Q: Was this helpful to have these fantasies and these conversations about—?

A: I would think so. It certainly didn't do us any harm. I think it got us over some rough spots. And you know we had to fill the time. You couldn't just sit and chew your thumbs and bite your nails all the time. You had to do something. Normal activities were far away, so we, we dreamt and talked and—

Q: Were these very detailed conversations about what your life would be like really?

⁸⁶ Stomach masturbation (German)

A: Yes. Oh, yes. I always did want to marry a doctor and have four children.

Q: Is that true?

A: Why not? I could dream. But it came true – that's the miracle. And I had two boys and two girls, just like I dreamt, and visualized, and hoped for, and prayed for. And all of them are now married. The youngest one just had a baby a couple of weeks ago. We went to the Brit,⁸⁷ and right here in Washington. It was very, very nice. I'm very fortunate. My husband is well and with me. So, it's really fortunate. And that's why I'm still religious. That's why I have made peace with, with God. After all he has thrown a lot my way that other people can only wish for. And so I live with that, with that multi-faceted God who can dispense great hardship, and great joy. Maybe that's the way it is.

04:14:34

Q: So you never lost your faith?

A: I struggled a lot. I struggled a lot, and I argued a lot with people, and I philosophized a great deal with, especially, one of my cousins who also remained very religious. And I philosophized a great deal with him. In fact I still have some of those letters that we wrote back and forth way back after I was released from Theresienstadt. And I struggled a great deal, but then by the time I married a very religious man, then the struggle was over and I had to come to some, to some peace within myself. And the peace is that there is no answer. That I have to live with a God who is good, and not good at the same time. And the answer is that there is no answer, that you have to just, just accept it. But the thing is you have to have something. I can't turn to, to drugs, or to hippy living, or to anything. You have to have something in your life. So my something is religion, and that's the answer for me. It's very unsatisfactory, but it's the best I can do.

04:16:03

Q: Did you ever get depressed?

A: Yes. I became very depressed after my first child was born. The interesting thing is, my mother was deported on the ninth of November, and my son was born on the ninth of November. My mother died on the eleventh of November, as I found out much later, and my second son was born on the eleventh of November. So there is this what I have just talked about. How do you live with something like that? So, what was your question?

Q: Did you ever get depressed?

⁸⁷ Circumcision (Hebrew)

A: Did I ever get depressed? Yes. After my first son was born I fell into a deep depression. I didn't function anymore. I had a home, I had a husband, I had a son. I was living in freedom. I had food on the table without end and I couldn't function any further. And my husband, who is a physician, advised me to seek professional help, which was in those days, in the early '40s, a stigma. You didn't go to a psychiatrist. You didn't go to a psychologist. You just dealt with your problems. But wisely enough he advised me to get professional help. And the interesting answer was that I had a guilt complex. Now in the early '40s that was unheard of. What was a guilt complex? Nobody knew that. Now we know that most people who do go through a hard time come out with a guilt feeling. And my complex was, "Why me? Why am I living this Life of Riley now? Why not my sister? Why not my husband's sisters? Why wasn't my mother alive to enjoy that baby with me? My husband's mother or father?" Everybody was gone with the exception of my father, in both our families. And why was I alive? What did I do that guaranteed me such joy? And the normal reaction, as I now know of the mind and the body, is a depression. And I got over it because I got help. And then I also got over it because I felt I had to do something for that gift of life, and I got over it then.

04:18:35

Q: How did you get out of Theresienstadt?

A: That was another miracle. That was another miracle. I can still see Eva and me sitting on our bunks. I can still see that in my mind. We were beginning to be very low, even Eva in all her Viennese humor and gaiety. It was February 1, 1945, and we were sitting on the upper bunk. We changed bunks every so often because the window was right at the upper bunk level, and why should one only look out the window all the time, so we changed bunks, and I don't know whose, whose turn it was, but we were sitting on the upper bunk and watching the cobblestones out in the window, and then somebody came. And all we could see, of course, was just up to their mid-calves. And anyone that ever came brought bad news, or God forbid the slip to go into the transport, so naturally we were – we stopped our conversation and we were very much afraid. And then the person that came said that the next transport would go to Switzerland, February 1, 1945. The war was on, killing was still in high gear, and somebody was going to take us to Switzerland? And so at first we just ignored it. And then the next morning, we heard it again. And then we heard it from people whom we trusted that were in with the administration, and we heard – especially we, we young women who were still looking pretty well, we heard, "Go ahead. Go and register for that transport. Hurry up." And so after a while, Eva in her light – I would never have registered, I'm sure I thank my whole life to her – she said, "Come on, let's go. Let's go. Let's register. Why wait for anything else?" And of course all we could think of was all those transports that they said would go to Palestine, and they never got to Palestine. So I said, "But what if we end up in Auschwitz?" So she said, "Then our problems are solved if we should join the other one. Then we're together already anyway. So, nothing to lose. We go."

04:21:00

So we went, and we had to register, which was very different from the other transports. We were looked over. We had to answer questions, especially the question I remember was, "Did any one of your family ever die in Theresienstadt, or was sent away to the East?" And we had nobody, you see. So we could say "no." And then we saw him write down that we could get into the transport. And then the next day – this was all packed into two days, you see. There was no way of come back in two weeks or anything like that, no red tape of any kind. So then the next day we got that brown slip that I showed you before where it says that we should appear on February the fourth, at seven o'clock in the evening, with one suitcase – no bedrolls, no rucksacks, nothing of the kind – and nicely dressed and punctual. The Germans were very much for punctuality, whether that was for your liberation or for your death, you be punctual. So we went, and we left the rest of the people in the basement room, and we really didn't believe we were really going to Switzerland. We did believe something was different. And in the train, it was not a cattle car this time, in the train we got packages of marmalade, and stuff that I didn't even know what to do with. And then we left, Eva and I very much together, and we really got to Switzerland. And when we got to Switzerland, we crossed the border into Switzerland I remember three things that stayed in my mind very much. We looked out the window. Number one, nobody yelled us, "Get back in or you'll be shot," you know. And number two, the people smiled. I hadn't seen a person smile in 12 years. What was there to smile at? All through my youth and my growing up. The people smiled at us. And the person that – then some Swiss people in uniform came in and they were nice to us, and that was unheard of, anyone in uniform being nice to Jews. What's this? Gan Eden?⁸⁸ Already we're dead and we're in paradise. Was unheard of. And then the third thing I remember, night fell and the lights stayed on. There was no war in Switzerland, you see. The lights purposely stayed on so the airplanes overhead could tell that it was Switzerland and wouldn't bomb it. But to us it was an epiphany. It was unheard of. So then we were allowed to pick one of the several places where we could go, and Eva and I stayed together and picked Les Avants, and then she fell in love with a French refugee who had also come, and she followed him to France because she was completely alone. And I contacted my father, and then he let me come over to America, and I married. And by gosh when our kids became teenagers they visited back and forth, and Jean⁸⁹ fell in love with Polly⁹⁰ – right under my eyes, and I didn't see it happen. And I didn't know for many years just how that all came about. May I tell you just very quickly.

04:24:38

Maybe you know it already, but to me it was a very, very fascinating story because I discovered it myself. It wasn't told to me. I went to the National Archives. I had an advisor, Tim Mulligan, to guide me through the whole process, and I discovered the documents and read them, and I found out that at the end of 1944, a Jewish-Swiss woman by the name of Recha Sternbuch, very religious woman.... I'll condense the story a little bit – approached

⁸⁸ Garden of Eden (Hebrew)

⁸⁹ Jean Hammel

⁹⁰ Polly Haas-Hammel

Jean-Marie Musy, who was a Swiss – a former Swiss President. First she thought she wanted her mother and father to be taken out of Germany. Musy was a friend of Himmler's and he had rescued a few Jews before, and she approached him to get her parents out. And then, she thought, "Why not try to get all the Jews out?" It was late in the war, and she asked him to contact Himmler, and she said she, in turn, would contact the Americans and see if for a certain ransom he would let the Jews out of Germany. And by gosh he agreed. This is now, of course, I'm condensing this very much. He agreed. Musy went to Germany to meet him first in his railroad car, then at another secret location, and he agreed. And I saw the correspondence between him and – Himmler and Musy – and then later with Sternbuch. He wanted first – first he wanted lorries, trucks to continue the war, but the Americans of course didn't do that. In the meantime Sternbuch had contacted the Va'ad Ha-Hatsala, which is the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of America and Canada. And they had formed this Va'ad, just for the purpose of helping the Jews – the war was ending – whom they knew would come and needed help, even in Europe. And when Sternbuch contacted them, they immediately agreed to collect money to buy out the Jews.

04:26:53

In the end, the first transport, it was exchanged for 5,000,000 American dollars, and was to be of twelve hundred people out of Theresienstadt, because we still looked good, and as I have said before, especially we young people were urged to, to come. And then Hitler – and the condition that Himmler made was that he should get good publicity in Swiss and American press. Why? Because he saw the war ending, and he saw his own fate clearly before him. After all, he was the originator of all that killing, and he now wanted to whitewash himself. He wanted good publicity and good treatment when the war ended. And this was done without Hitler's knowledge. And Hitler heard about it. When the first 1,200 Jews came out, he heard about it. And he immediately disinherited Himmler. Himmler had to flee, and he forbade every other contact – every other release – Jews or non-Jews – nobody leaves Germany anymore. So we were the only transport. And Musy, who it is believed enriched himself from those 5,000,000 dollars went back into obscurity. Nobody heard from him. Then he died. He was already 76 years old at the time of his intercourse with Himmler. But he died later. Mrs. Sternbuch was much honored and also died much later – in '71. And Himmler had to flee first from Hitler, who was going to kill him – and he wandered around Lüneburger Heide which is a place – a lonely place in Germany, and then he had to flee from the Allies. It was the English – the British that captured that part of Germany. And when the Allies did capture him, not knowing whom they had, he took cyanide and killed himself. And then they knew it was Himmler. It was too late. And I was saved. He tried to save himself and he saved me instead. Isn't that a miracle? I was number 1,400– number 1,174 out of those 1,200.

Q: And Eva was 1,100 and–

A: Seventy-five. She was right next – right behind me. It's really something.

04:29:35

Q: Was it difficult for you to part from Eva when she got married – when she followed this–?

A: It was. I remember that quite well. She, she – we said “goodbye” to each other at the, at the train station in Zurich, and well, of course, she was the happiest woman in the world. She was very much in love with Eric, who – her future husband. The interesting thing is they were married in Paris, and who would be the officiating Rabbi? My own Eli Munk from Ansbach. Isn't that something. And then when Jean and Polly got engaged and were about to marry, Eli Munk was then a very old gentleman already and he was living in New York, and the marriage was in Boston, and I wanted very much for him to marry our children. But then he was already. He tried, but he was already too old. But, no, it wasn't all that hard for us to, to part. We knew we would stay friends, and we knew we would visit each other, and we did. She and I had some great visits with each other. She lost her husband much too soon, and her son and my daughter had four children, and we are very devoted grandmothers.

04:31:02

Q: Did you ever talk with Munk once you re-found him about his leaving and not telling people?

A: Oh, yes. I didn't say that to him. You can't say that to a beloved and respected Rabbi. That was something that I, that I have to keep in my own mind because I'm still very friendly with his sons and daughters – especially with his daughter who married the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, Jakobovitz,⁹¹ and I'm very friendly with Lady Emily(ph). And I still adore her father and her mother, although they're now gone. But you see when I got to Switzerland there's another very interesting connection. They had to flee Paris – Munks with all their children – in '44 or '45. They had to flee Paris, and they fled to Geneva, and when he heard that I was in Les Avants, which is very close to Geneva, he came immediately to visit me. And you know it was like a father coming. He was so associated with my youth, and so, so beloved by me that, that was a bond that never dissolved. And then they invited me their house, and the children were all very small, and it was a homecoming for me, you see. And now I have long forgiven him that. I didn't even think about it anymore. It just came back to me now as I was thinking about Ansbach. But you know, the normal measurements of ethics do not apply to the years of the Holocaust. They just don't apply. Was everybody justified in trying to save his or her own life? Were people justified in trying to save their own baby, knowing that if that baby wasn't taken, another mother's baby would have to be substituted? Was I justified to let my mother and sister? Was my father justified to leave us? You cannot apply those normal moral standards to the Holocaust years. You just can't. You just can't. So I have long forgiven him that he saved his life, and his whole family's life. Why should that whole family also have disappeared? And he has since done so much good. He's been such an outstanding Rabbi. And then we were not bound to obey him even though he said, "Stay. Everything will

⁹¹ Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovitz

be okay." Many people left. We could have left too, and we did after a while. So that's a whole other philosophical problem that you just can't allow yourself to get into it. You get lost in the swamp.

04:33:59

Q: What was it like to see your father after – what, six years?

A: Oh, that was, that was after... Let's see, he left in '39, and I saw him again in '46 – in April of '46, and it was very strange. I came by boat, and I arrived – I think it was during the Passover – during the Pesach holidays. And my father remained very religious. And he came to Boston to pick me up. I arrived at the Boston Harbor, and he couldn't travel to the boat to pick me up. He sent somebody else, and that somebody took me then to an apartment where he stayed and I saw him again. And I thought that I would see an old man because I had gone through so much. I had lived six lifetimes, you see, that to me it was like a 100 years. And I thought there would be this old, broken man full of grief, and full of sorrow and remorse. But it wasn't. There was a young, beautiful, dark haired, straight, upright man in his prime – 50 years old – who greeted me. And that was – I had to adjust my inner vision and my outer, and what I saw in reality. That took a little bit. And it took a while for us to become comfortable with each other. I will have to admit that. I will have to admit that.

04:35:42

Q: For you had gone from a child in a way, right?

A: Yes. Yes, yes. And you see he didn't really know what we went through. He had his own struggles. It's not that he had a bed of roses. He came up from nothing, and he had great sorrow to try to get us over. I have seen his notes after his death, that he never showed me actually. But I saw how he went from "Pontius to Pilate," from one person to the other, begging for help – and nobody helped him. And that wasn't easy either. That couldn't have been an easy task either – and knowing that his family....

Q: And what did he end up doing in the United States?

A: He remained a butcher. Remember he had no real education. He first worked for some other Jewish kosher butchers in Washington Heights in New York, and then he and his brother opened their own little butcher shop – Schild Brothers – and they became quite successful, but always within the German Jewish community. And you see his fear of anyone non-Jewish also never left him. He also carried the scar even though he didn't go through the worst. But he told me once when somebody came into the store that spoke English, they immediately were afraid. They immediately thought it was someone to inspect the store, or to make trouble, or to want something from them. You see, we all, we all have our scars. You can't go through this without scars – you just can't. So he was always afraid of anyone not Jewish as well. Those were the enemies. But he lived to a ripe old age. He married again

– a woman who was in Theresienstadt and lost her husband and two children there. I never knew her there – I couldn't, it was much too big to know people. We were so restricted and then she was much older. I didn't readily associate or become friendly with people of my parents' age. I stayed very much with my own age, and possibly with the very old people that I went to visit. But I never knew her, and she was very good to him 'til the day he died. And he only died about nine years ago at the age of 92. He remained very religious. We became very close too at the end. He never spoke – I always thought he would say something, at least on his deathbed still, that he shouldn't have left us, or something like that, but he never did. This is another thing I, I don't understand.

04:38:54

Q: Did you talk together about what had happened?

A: No.

Q: Nothing?

A: Hardly ever. I won't say never, but hardly ever.

Q: And did he know what had happened to your mother and sister?

A: Barely. Barely. Barely. I don't think he wanted to know.

Q: And did you live together for a while?

A: Yes, but very short, only – I married very soon after I came over. I married within six months, and so those six months we, we – he roomed with a family. After all he was completely alone. And that family took me also in and gave me a room in the same latch apartment. So we were together for a while. But during that time we were not close, not at all. I could not find a way to him, and he, he was obviously guilt ridden too. He never really asked. Then toward the very end he gave me my mother's letters, and then, then he was already mellowed, and he gave me my sister's letters, and my own letters. And then he gave me also the letters that I wrote to him from Switzerland, so I have a huge bunch of letters which, which are very, very, very interesting.

04:40:17

Q: The last question, maybe – or the penultimate question. You said that after you became – after you were depressed and went to a therapist, and then was better, or well–

A: By a psychiatrist, right?

Q: Right. That you decided that you had to do something.

A: Yes. Yes, I decided—

Q: What did you do?

A: Well, two things – one egotistical and the other altruistic. The egotistical first. I got myself an education. I went to college. My husband, my husband was always very understanding of me. He could see, he could see my whole situation much better than I could. And by then – this took a while. My first depression occurred after my first baby was born. And then I still was very timid, very much afraid of authority, very much reluctant to approach anyone that was in authority ‘cause that was dangerous up ‘til then. So then after a while I missed very much that I didn't have an education. And after a while then I went to Bates College in Lewiston, and they accepted me as one of the very first non-College age students. See now, this is different. This was in the ‘50s – in the ‘60s. I graduated in ‘71. I was only the second person of non- of not eighteen years old. I was like 46 or 47, and I did alright. I graduated with a lot of honors and I loved every moment of it. And then I was done. And then I didn't know what to do again, so my husband urged me and he said, "Go to graduate school. Become a librarian," ‘cause I liked books. And I did that and again I graduated, so now what? So he said, "Take a job. Be a librarian." And Bates College took me as a librarian, and I was very happy there during the years.

04:42:22

And then the second part comes in – the altruistic part if I may say so. Then I began to realize Bates College, up to not too long ago, was a very Baptist college. When my husband became college physician in – soon after our marriage, in the early ‘50s, he was only the second Jewish employee of that whole college, and the college was in existence for some 150 years or so – and very limited Jewish students and no Jewish activities. And they didn't know Jews or Jewish contexts or nothing about the Holocaust. So an opportunity presented itself, ready made, and I stepped in. I got myself funding from the National Humanities Counsel, and from Jewish organizations, and I began to educate the College. I did programs of Jewish contexts, and I made month-long informational college affairs where the people could hear speeches and ask questions, have dialogues, and simply inform themselves, "What is Judaism? What are Jews? What are the finer points of it?" And really, I was quite successful. I got a Jewish library into the college, when the Rabbi of the city where I lived died. This was all back in Maine. We settled in Maine. When he died I was instrumental in getting his whole library into the College, and it's known now as the Rabbi Barrend(ph) Jewish Library, and it's a fine, fine library. I catalogued it, and integrated it as a special library. And that drew Jewish interest. And from that library – I used that again as my platform – I gave Jewish talks, and got Jewish persons in. I had Hilberg.⁹² I had Lansky⁹³ of the Yiddish Center. I had Velvel Pasternak of Jewish music. I – who me? I brought all these

⁹² Raul Hilberg

⁹³ Aaron Lansky

people in and I educated them. Then finally I saw a need – the people wanted to teach the Holocaust and they didn't know what to do. They didn't know how to teach it. So out of that activity, out of all those Jewish affairs that I had organized, was some money left over in the end, and I organized the Holocaust Human Rights Center of Maine for the purpose of helping the teachers teach the Holocaust. And that was a very fine success. I moved out of Maine, but the Center stayed, and we have an oral history project, of course. We have a teachers' guidebook. We have all kinds of things, were successful. And then I felt better. I don't have a – I still feel terrible about my losses, but I don't feel guilty anymore. And I speak all around the country. And I hear students – I see there is a necessity to speak, because the students know only democracy. The constant question is, "Well, why didn't you just not go," you know. Or, "Why didn't you say you weren't Jewish?" Or, "How come you had to give your house up?" They don't understand this. They're living in a democracy. They don't understand what it is to live in an autocracy. So I still – I still feel a need to talk and to write, and to answer questions. And I wrote a second book, and I'm writing one now for even younger children, because they need to know.

04:46:30

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to, to say, that you haven't said?

A: I'm exhausted. That's what I'd like to say. You were a great interviewer, but you got all the things out of me that were long buried, and that had to come up again, and had to be talked about. My life is a patchwork. But the nice thing is that the good parts are the quilted ones. And the not good parts, they just are there. They just are there, but... I still have nightmares. I still, I still have nightmares today, but during the day I'm a very happy person. Thank you.

Q: Thank you very much.

A: That's it. I'll refer them to you.

04:47:33

Q: What are we seeing here?

A: That's Ansbach. That's the house I was born in – Turnitzstrasse fünf⁹⁴, and behind those windows on the left hand side was the bedroom. And in the front here on the right hand side of the door was my father's butcher shop. Nice. My mother and my father in happy times walking away there. I think that's in Ansbach – near our house. It's not in front of our house. Siegfried and Paula Schild – very clear. Oh, that's a picture in Ansbach in our back yard. That's my grandmother Sophie on the one side, and my Aunt Berta and a cousin visiting. And that's in the, in the yard where the chickens ran around, and the very background there, that was my father's sausage room where he made the sausage. And on the side, I think that

⁹⁴ Five (German)

was our compost heap, if I'm not mistaken. That was very rural, but happy times. That was still in grade school though. That's a class picture still in grade school – still happy. I'm the one with the pigtails on the top row, fourth from the right, skinny little gal – and still quite happy. That must have been... How old could I have been there? Eight or nine? Oh, then we're already 16 or so – no, not quite. I'm not on that picture. My sister Friedl is the one on the right hand side with the short hair; one of the few pictures I have of her. Of that whole group only two survived, and I'm still friendly with them. And my poor sister was, of course, one of the victims. Yep, that's my sister Friedl. Yes, that was the youth group we had, always clustered around our beloved Rabbi, Eli Munk, and his wife there with the shaytel on, on his right, and on the right of Mrs. Munk is my sister Friedl – there, there she is. That's Friedl. And I'm there too. I'm in back between Mrs. Munk and Friedl, with the pigtails, and those were such happy times. It was probably Shabbos afternoon when we were singing zmiros⁹⁵ and he was telling us stories, and those were such happy times. Most everybody else is gone in that picture, but it was the same. And that's Elie Munk again in the back, and all the boys – probably having another session with him and Mrs. Munk. And that was our Hebrew teacher that fellow in the back. Ya, and that's our group. How pretty she was.

04:50:59

Q: Can you point out your sister and yourself?

A: Sorry?

Q: Can you point out your sister and yourself?

A: Ya. My sister is the one on the right hand side. Her friend has her arm around her. You can see the hand. And in front of that same friend, that's me. Huh? Oh yes. That was a Purim play. I think we were a farmer and his wife or something like that. That's in our back yard. And the background is simply my mother's bedspreads hung up there with clothespins – to keep out all the rest of the back yard. And that's my sister and me, Friedl and Gerda Schild. My grandmother Sophie Jochsberger – a very dear woman. She looms large in my memory – always kind – always time for me. A very sweet person.

Q: When did she die?

04:52:00

A: She died, thank God, she still died a normal death with her daughter in Regensburg, the one we saw before. And she's buried in Regensburg. It was 19– about – no, later than that – about 1939, before the transportations. Oh, another picture from my happy youth, also in our back yard, the smokestack between Friedl and me is where my father smoked all the sausages, and on my left shoulder there, that's my father's grinding stone. He sharpened up

⁹⁵ Songs (Hebrew)

his butcher knives there. I can still see that, and that's really the chicken yard right there – the chicken house – in back of the grindstone – and my mother's laundry hanging there – and Friedl and I just hanging out, as they would say now... Just being happy. Too bad she had to – she couldn't have a life. That's a much photographed back yard, I'm telling you. You can see a typical Fachwerkhaus⁹⁶ house in the back there. There's my father, and Friedl and I, and my cousin Edith, the same one that was in the picture before – a very sweet little girl. She came to us for summer vacations every year, and we always were happy together. Ah, another picture of my happy youth. That was an outing with the whole group. It was called the JJA; the Jewish Youth Group of Ansbach. And that's Friedl, the very – the white figure on the right hand side – on the very right. And that's me, the second from the left. There I'm already a tall girl. Also, I was the younger one. I very soon was taller than Friedl as you can already see here. I've already surpassed her in height, and probably also in width, and she never held it against me. She was much too good-natured for that. And the rest of the gang, I remember them all. Very few of them are still alive, unfortunately. Friedl and I – just little pictures that somebody snapped. I'm on the top of the frame, and she's on the bottom.

04:54:35

Q: Do you have any idea when this – these photos were taken?

A: I would say that was taken in Munich, just before we left for nurses training. It's very possible that those were our official pictures to get into nursing training. Ya, that's me with my nurse's uniform on. I was so proud of it. It was probably the first picture I sent back when I got to Berlin.

Q: So that's 1940?

A: 1940, exactly. That was a picture that I had taken once I was liberated into Switzerland, and I took care of that little boy. I'm still in tact with – in contact with his family. Of course he's now a 50 year old man, and I took care of him for a while. That's the Jewish star I was attached to from September, 1941 to February 12, 1945, when I ripped it off in the train that took me to Switzerland. And you can see then I didn't take care anymore of it. Up to then, I had to be very careful with it. If it looked like that, if I had worn it, I could have been shot. But once I ripped it off in Switzerland, I didn't care anymore what it looked like, and you can see the writing on it is simulated Hebrew lettering. It's so evil.

Q: And it's about, what do you think – two and a half – next to a pencil – maybe two and a half inches?

A: It was still the size of the – of the palm of your hand.

Q: Okay.

⁹⁶ Framework house (German)

04:56:30

A: Yes, that was my Theresienstadt box. That was given to me on my birthday by one of my friends who worked in – who probably worked in a woodcarving factory or something. It had a cover at one time, which I have long lost. It's made of wood, and lined with some paper, and on the back of it, it says, "Ghetto Theresienstadt," and the date of my birth – "23rd of November, 19—" well, that was in '43 – 23rd of November is my birthday, and it was given to me on my 21st birthday – 1943. I was born in 22. And that was my birthday gift, and I treasured it ever since.

Q: Was this Jirca who gave you...?

A: I think so. I'm not altogether sure anymore who gave it to me. I think it was Jirca. He was my most fervent, and I think my sole admirer in Theresienstadt. He swore that as soon as he would come back from the Osttransport he would find me, and then he wanted to marry me, but I think deep down we both knew that he would never come back. Now what you're seeing here is my permission to be a nurse in the Ghetto of Theresienstadt. It says here, "Gerda Schild," and there is my ghetto number – the name meant nothing, the number was everything – and Ubikation, that meant where I lived. I was in C-3. That was still in the Hamburger Kaserne, and it says here that I can now work as a nurse, and am permitted to wear a uniform, and it was signed by Erich Munk – he was the health officer there – and dated as well. And my place of work was going to be Q 721. That was later renamed Bergstrasse seven.

Q: Can you just explain the lettering. It was Q, and there was another letter–

A: Q and L. Originally the whole Theresienstadt was divided into Q streets which went one way, and L... Q meant queer – Queer and Long – and the others were longitude – Longitude and Queer, and Q and L, that was all there was. But then when the Commission came, suddenly there appeared beautifully decorated little wooden signs on each street with fancy names – Bergstrasse and Wiesenstrasse(ph), and what have you, and Q was 7 – was then Bergstrasse 7. And this is my permission to go into the Swiss transport with my number 1,174 on the right hand corner, and it tells me not to bring any ugly bedrolls – just to bring a neat suitcase and be gone. Oh, that's finally a picture of my family. I defied Hitler and started a family and brought new Jews into the world. My husband and I, and those are my four children. Polly was probably – 12 then. She's the one that later married Jean. And that's Len⁹⁷ who's now in Utah, and Hedy,⁹⁸ who is in Minneapolis – She's the reason we moved there, and that's David⁹⁹ who just had a baby here in Washington. What a lovely group of kids.

⁹⁷ Len Haas

⁹⁸ Hedy Haas-David

⁹⁹ David Haas

Q: And Polly's on the far left behind you.

A: That's right. That's our Polly. That was in Maine approximately 1965, I would guess. And after I brought up the children and defied Hitler one way, I went ahead and defied him again and told the story of my life, and other people's lives, and the history of the Holocaust in two books. This is the second book, and I'm still writing now another third book. And this is just coming out by Lerner Brothers¹⁰⁰ in Minneapolis. I'm pretty proud of it.

05:01:03

End of Tape #4

Conclusion of Interview

¹⁰⁰ Lerner Group Publishing