

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Gerda Klein
March 13, 1992
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Gerda Klein, conducted on March 13, 1992 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview 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.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

GERDA KLEIN

March 13, 1992

This is Sound Roll #1; Wentworth Films; Holocaust; 7-1/2 IPS; 60 cycle sync; 3/13/92; Scottsdale, Arizona; Camera roll 1 is up; Sync take #1 is up; The following is interview with Gerda Klein (spells out).

Beep.

Q: Let's talk about the start of the war and some of the things that you remember from that time.

A: I remember it very vividly. As you well know, war broke out on, on the first of September uh, uh Germany said that they declared war. Of course, there was no declaration, they simply marched across the border, and we lived very close from the Czechoslovakian border, Czechoslovakia already having been occupied by Germany. But um, I uh, I remember it um, now, actually I was terribly busy, you know, first of all, my father had suffered a heart attack just a few weeks earlier, and was a great deal of uh concern and turmoil and all that, and this was our prime concern, and another of course, um, school was going to start in another week or so, so you know I was getting ready for school and talking to my friends, and um, n-not really truly being aware of uh, of what might be happening, and that was the last week of August or so. Um, we really came face to face with it on Friday morning, very early in the morning when people said to--there were lots of planes, we, we heard a row of, of many planes, and um, when we went out to the street to see it, uh, the wings of the planes had the swastika on it, and that was the first ominous thing of sort of helplessness and, and uh oh you know, this was above us, they could do almost anything, and uh, that-----broke out. People started um, digging holes in the, in the yards and erecting uh barricades, and my father was um, was upstairs in in the bedroom, and my mother cautioned everyone not to mention the war to him, and uh, didn't let him listen to the radio or anything, but I guess my father knew, obviously, what was going on. And uh, and it was a horrible night, uh, there were lots of explosions and I remember being in my parents' bedroom with my, my mother and my brother and I, and this is when my uh father told me to go and call the family, and I remember...

Q: We better stop.

A: Am I talking too long?

A: -----just started.

Beep.

Q: Okay. Let's continue with the beginning of the war. Why don't we do the Saturday, the quiet Saturday.

A: Saturday was, was very, very quiet. As a matter of fact, I remember it just um, it still is one of the most beautiful and probably the last peaceful day of my life. You realize I was only 15 at the time, and um, I remember in the morning, we wanted to turn on the radio and there was no sound. The electricity had been cut off, there was not telephone. Um, my father got up, he had been so ill before and was the first time I saw him dressed again. He suddenly looked very grey and very old, and when I look back now, I realize that he was only 4, 49 I guess. And, uh, I remember we were sitting at breakfast, was a beautiful, beautiful autumn day, very bright, very golden, flowers were bright outside, and we were all together, and it seems all activity outside has, has stopped as well, and um, it um, it was sort of a very, very special memorable day because it had no, no intrusion whatsoever, and uh, and we were together, and uh, then in the evening, great deal of activity started. There was shooting, there were planes, uh there was some explosions. We went to the basement. My cat was outside, and my brother went out to let the cat in, the cat was meowing, and he came back with a hole in his trousers, and he said there was shooting from the rooftops, and the Germans were coming. I don't remember too much more of that night, but I remember in the morning we came out from the basement, and we sat around the table, and my brother walked towards the window, and, and then he sort of sat down, and at that moment, we had an incredible roar, and a motorcycle came down the street, and it had a ----- behind it, and there were people in different uniforms, you know, our army, the Polish army had sort of uh beige, khaki uniforms, and those uniforms were green. No, I'm sorry, um, actually what happened, we saw people walking with flowers and cameras.

Q: Wait, we have to stop, there's a noise.

A: Yeah, I jumped ahead.

Q: Wait for the noise.

Beep.

A: Okay, let's pick up with seeing the people with flowers.

Q: Saw people with flowers and cameras, walking up the street. You know, our street was called Shishinska, which means uh, like uh, Czechoslovakia, which was the street which led to the Czech border, and people were walking up that street, and my mother said something like, "Oh my God, I hope they are not...", and at this point that motorcycle came down the street, was an incredible roar, came down the street, and was two German military in them, and uh, the thing which I remember most vividly, my brother had his wristwatch in his pocket, and he was just removing it from his pocket, and so, his hand must have trembled because his watch fell to the floor, and I remember seeing, it, it was 9:10 in the morning, and I was sort of thinking that something that, that was the moment when, when our world was gone.

A: Tell me about the woman who wanted your Polish -----.

Q: Uh, well, we um, we realized that things were uh, what, what was most astonishing thing is that uh, we heard roars of uh people, our neighbors, and friends and people I've known all my life, you know. My mother was born in the same home I was born, and you know, it's been in the family I don't know for how many generations, and, uh, uh people were shouting you know, "Heil Hitler! Long live the Fuehrer," and, and, and, and people were waving flags with Swastikas and uh, there was a feeling of complete betrayal, sud-suddenly you were home and, and you were not home anymore. You know, I mean, uh it was Poland you know, and we, we love Poland it was uh, uh at least a young generation, you know because the older generation had grown up, up under Austria, but of course, we were born under Poland, and uh, this is something I couldn't understand and, and probably uh the most, the most vivid example of that was that my friend Trudy, who uh had a ve-a very bitter life and her mother had died, and she had a stepfather, her mother married a, a that man went through, there was very little, he was terribly cruel to her, and he was beating her, and she spent so much time with us, was a, a, you know, and I, I really felt oh so close to her, and I saw her going to our garden and picking white roses. My mother was particularly proud of them because they had bloomed out of season and, and she was handing it to a sold--to a German soldier, you know, and people were bringing, and, and, and I think that gesture always sticks in my mind as, as one of complete betrayal, and also I remember her handing the roses to the soldier who is reaching out to her, and at that moment, someone else was handing him a glass of Schnapps, or what, you know, it was some sort of whiskey, and he let the roses fall to, to, to, to the ground and people were trampling on my roses, and um, uh, I don't know it, it's sort of like it became a symbol for me, that very moment, it's arrested in my mind that uh, what, what was happening there, that everything was sort of upside down, and um...I don't know.

A: Tell me about the neighbor who wanted -----.

Q: Then there was a woman, you know people, how people try to be helpful, I, I don't mean to uh, uh to say that um, that it was a direct betrayal of us, at that particular point it was not, but of...

A: Stop.

Q: Four is up.

A: Beep.

Q: Of course we, we had some very good and very close friends among our neighbors, and uh, one woman, her name was uh Frau Resher, I remember, she came in, and she asked where the Polish Flag was. The Polish flag, of course, is uh, a strip of white and a strip of red, very long strips, and my mother said, "Why?" And she said, it's really very easy to make a German flag out of it, you know, all you have to do is um cut out around um thing of the from the white and then pose it on the, on the red, and then with a ribbon, make the swastika, you know, I, and my mother absolutely turned pale, and the woman said, "We we better make that flag and fly from the house, you know, obviously she wanted to protect us because uh, the houses which did not fly uh the swastika flag uh were under scrutiny, and uh, they figured that they were you know, anti-German, and they discovered that we were Jewish so uh, she just took the flag, my mother looked for it in all places where she knew she couldn't find it, but finally she did produce it and uh, and she did make, my mother did not, but the neighbor and another one made the flag, and uh, and it was sort of unbelievable to see uh that flag flying from my childhood home. I remember I thought of it like a spider, you know the swastika sort of reaching out to, to engulf us, and uh, was a horrible thing, something that was supposed to be for our protection was actually terribly ----- particularly, you know, to a young girl, and it all came so fast, it was all, within a day.

A: Okay. Now we do have to reload.

Q: Change film, going to Camera roll 2; Sync take 5 is up.

Beep.

Q: Okay.

A: The war started in September. By, by Christmas we had to move to the basement of our home. It was very cold and clammy. We, we had no, no running water, no electricity, and uh, things were really quite bad, but we were still in our own home. Uh, and spring was very difficult because I always loved my garden. I used to spend a lot of time there as a child, and the sign appeared there, that dogs and Jews were not permitted to enter. Um, when we had orders to move to uh, Shabby?? a remote corner of our town, which became the ghetto, uh, I defied that order. I remember I, I said, "I don't care what they're going to do." I had to see my garden again. Was a beautiful, fragrant spring morning, was in April, and uh, I remember I jumped over the fence, and went to the garden, and pretended that uh, that I was just, I was picking violets, and I pretended just for a little bit, what it would be like if uh, if the war hadn't happened, if I would be going in, my mother would say I, I need to take my raincoat to school, and my brother would be hurrying off, my father would be going to his office, my mother would be setting the table for breakfast, and urging us to -----, and uh, I remember it was sort of the most incredible thing that um, uh the reality which I had always taken for granted, now became uh the most remote fantasy. I then, I think it stayed with me you know, in a way, throughout all the years to, to return to that. Later, of course, it took on other forms of um, when I was in the camps, to imagining evening at home, but here I still was looking at my childhood home, home, my parents were inside, my brother had been taken away, um, maybe six weeks after the war started, he was taken away October 19th, and the war broke out the first of September, but I was with my parents at home, I could, I could see from the garden, the room which had been mine, the wallpaper, um, even though we lived in the basement, I was still there, and, and yet um, I somehow must have been at least subconsciously aware that maybe I'm never come back, so I'd never recognize it, you know, I, I lived throughout with this thing, I'm going to go home, always, but uh, when I look back now over, over the many years, uh, and I, I still can very vividly recall my feeling, it, uh, it was sort of a farewell to, to my life and to my childhood, and I was sixteen at that point.

Q: In the ghetto, tell me about some of things you remember.

A: Well, you know, as much as I dreaded going to the ghetto, um, actually in some ways, it was a little easier for me because my friends were there, you know, I was not as isolated as I had been at home, when we had curfew and I could see my friends only at a certain time, and it was dangerous to go out anyway, but still we were uh, I was closer to my friends, so um, that somewhat compensated for, for the treatment so, so you know in, in, in every little room another tragedy played. Um, and then we had to work, um, and uh, in a nearby community called Badovitz, they had the shops there, where they were sewing uniforms for, I guess for the army, and we were

marched, my, my mother and I and all, all went. Of course, you know, in the ghetto there were almost no men, there were mostly women and children, older people. My father, uh, was one of the few because he had had that heart attack and he was permitted to stay but he had to work in the, also in the nearby little town to fortify the river, in a place called Suhar, and uh we were terribly worried every morning that might be daybreak, 4 or 5 o'clock that he'd left because he had a heart condition, and we were afraid what that hard labor will, will do to him, and uh, my mother and I and some of my friends who few blessedly are still alive, um had to go to, to Baravitz to work in, in that uh, shop sewing. We left in the morning and came back late at night and then the whole thing started again, and actually I uh, I, I think the discipline was, was pretty good, you know you are so tired, you worked so hard that uh you did not get too much time to reflect of, of what was happening. At least for me it was, I'm sure it was much more difficult for my mother. And, and then well, um, -----from 1939 uh till the worst day of my life, the 28th of June, 42. Um, that is when I saw my father for the last time, the following day my mother. We were told to assemble. Uh, the day before um, we were, I uh, I heard my parents, of course, you know we all lived in one room, and I heard my parents talk through that night, and I still cannot comprehend their incredible bravery. They spoke only of, of their lives together, of their love, their good times, their children, their parents, and with that they faced the morning. I don't know, it sort of became uh, perhaps my own defense, I always felt, you know and thinks got-----and volunteers??? that I had to emulate my parents. If they could do it, I can do it. And then I must, you know, never disappoint them, I knew that that if they return and, and I thought, those things are, these, I thought when they return, I will never will say, you know, I will, I will show them that I um, that I'll come back, I'll do everything to come back to them because I remember how, how horrible it was for them when my brother left. Blessedly they never knew that my brother did not return. But, you know, that was the daily conversation, when Arthur comes back home and this and that. And I felt that, you know, I owed it to them to, to stay alive, no matter what, and not give them the pain of that loss. And however, you know we had, of course I always had a great -----, so I was not particularly religious, I had a great deal of respect for religion and books, and um, one of the things I wanted to do after I said goodbye to my father, I wanted to I, I knew what would happen in the ghetto, you see my father was taken away on Sunday the 28th of June, and um, I asked a friend of mine to go with me and collect uh prayer books, you know, I, I was afraid when they'll find it, they'll probably use it for toilet tissue or something like that. And we dragged, was a rainy day, and we dragged those books out to little cemetery which was adjacent to the ghetto, and an old uh cemetery, we took the books there, we, we couldn't really bury them, but we sort of stashed them on one of those where they were um, I, I guess were, were some cottons and things where apparently I, I don't remember that too well, but I know that this is how we first tried to bury some of them, and that sort of, you know, if it's a decency of, of, of a burial. I would rather not recall

the night the last night which I spent with my mother which was a very bitter, and then in the morning, you know, very, very early in the morning, uh, came the final moment. Uh, when they rushed through the ghetto with their whips and what have you. My poor mother, you know, my brother left on a Monday, and he left it 3 years prior to that. And my mother fasted every Monday, sort of atoning, I don't know for what. Uh, probably begging God if she's going to fast that my brother will return, and that was also on a Monday, and I, I remember I begged her to have something to eat and she wouldn't, but she had also uh, saved from before the war, a bit of cocoa, and uh, and some jam, and she decided to make that cocoa for me that morning. I remember it, she was looking at that cocoa with great longing, we didn't have any throughout. But, it didn't taste particularly sweet on that morning. We had to march through our town, and um, my...I guess it's a sort of a similar journey than a journey to execution when I think of it now because, you know, you saw people looking out from behind curtains. Some waving sort of a mute farewell, uh, seeing uh somebody was painting a new sign on a shop. The movie was putting on a new feature on the marquee, and uh, and we were marching. Ah. Was an SS man there that turned, that was near the railroad tracks where the circus used to come, was sort of a an empty place, accommodating all kinds of things as a circus before, and now sort of a tragedy of -----nature.

Q: We just have to reload.

Wentworth Films; Holocaust; 7-1/2 IPS; 60 cycle sync; 3/13/92; Scottsdale, AZ; Camera roll 3 is up; Sync take 6 is up; We're continuing interview with Gerda Klein.

Beep.

Q: If you could pick up, maybe you should tell me who Marin was and...

A: Okay. I, I was with my mother, and a number of my friends, who were with their mothers, and um, we heard that Marin was there. Um, Marin was um, a man of um, uh, if the stories to be believe of uh, not anyone to, to be greatly admired. Um, a man apparently of a little character, what have you, he was called an opportunist, and uh, this opportunity was presented to him that he uh was, was working with uh, with the government there. The story also had that he uh he had a child, a little daughter whom apparently he adored, and that he would do anything in order to save that child, and um, the Nazis apparently gave him that opportunity that if he would be helpful to interpret or get people to come there, his child would be saved. That was the story, I don't know how, how much truth that was in it. But I saw him, he was a, a very small sort of sour-looking man and it was, it was raining but it was oppressively hot because it was the end of June, and he was

wearing a sleek raincoat, and uh, and then of course there were the Germans in uniforms, the Nazis, the SS, he was standing to the side, we had to form a line, and an SS man stood there with um, with a little stick and um, I was holding hands with my mother, I came up to him, and he says, "How old?" I said, "18," and he sort of pushed me to one side and my mother to the other side. I, I wasn't aware what was happening at that particular point, but shortly thereafter, when I stood with my other friends who were also separated from their mothers, we realized that we were going to go to separate places. There was enclosure, an enclosure there, this barbed wire, to, to the right where our mothers were, and we were immediately taken to, to the left. Now again, I, I don't remember the time sequence at all. I just remember a tremendous panic and uh, and shortly thereafter some trucks arrived, uh, open trucks with, with sort of a gate behind it, and we were loading in the truck, and uh, I heard my mother's voice and I thought ask, "Where to?" and I shouted back, "I don't know." And, I guess I must have been aware that that I was taken away from my mother so I jumped off, and Marin came, and he was very slight, small man, I didn't expect such strength in him, and he picked me up bodily and he threw me on the truck and he says, "You are too young to die." And, uh, I guess, the trucks were set in motion, again, I tried, I don't remember the, the time sequence and uh, I just heard my mother's voice over the entire uh, over crying and everything, and it came like an echo and she was saying, you know, "Be strong," you know, "-----," in German. And then the trucks rolled out of there, and, ironically the, the sun came out sort of um, I still see it, the rooftops looked wet, illuminated by the sun, and the church bells were ringing, and that was the last view. We were taken to...were taken to a train, and of course, I was with my friends, and I think we, we all started talking and facing the reality what was probably happening, and I remember rejecting it completely, thinking it cannot be, you know. Uh, they're going to be all right, and frankly, that kept me going all those years. They have to be all right. We went to Sosnovitch, which was a transit camp. Uh, you see our part, it belonged to Austria before the first world war. This is why we were German-speaking, this was quite early, this was 1942 and 42, and um, and that transit camp, your names, your ages, and the places you hail from were registered. I came from Berlitz, which was a well-known textile center, they called it the Manchester of Central Europe, and the people would come from all over Germany who were in need of labor. The men were in the army, the women were given responsible positions, and they needed slave labor, however they needed people who could understand German and speak German. So, we were in a - - - - - position. And a man came from Kramstamatnaphronic???, which was a very large textile um center I guess, or maybe many factories, in Germany, and he bought us for that factory to be slaves, and, but, in that - - - - - , transit camp, I think I came face to face for the first time with the concept of concentration camp, to which of course, slave labor concentration, we were because uh, shipments came with girls from the camps who were either named - - - - - , and that was um, the last stop before Auschwitz, and I met those girls, and I remember my first contact was

probably the first evening when we when we stood, um, in line to get some food out of you know --
-----aluminum bowls, you know, we used to feed our dogs out of bowls like that, and I didn't understand when that bowl was given to my hand, what to do with it. And then we stood in line, and I got some food, and uh, I remember putting a spoon in and scraping because there was sand in the bottom, you know, and I saw this girl was you know, her hair was uh very short shorn hair, and she had enormous eyes, she was emaciated, and she looked sort of hungry, and I asked if she wanted it, and she looked at me as if I gave her the greatest treasure, and she said, "Yes," she said, "Aren't you hungry," and I said, "No," and she was sort of silhouetted against, uh, this fence, and she sort of gave a benediction when, when she get it, and then she handed me an, an empty bowl and I, I didn't understand, and she said, "You know, if I, we found with two bowls, I'll be beaten that I stole it." She gave me that that bowl, and that was sort of the first impact of things to come. I uh was with a very close friend of mine, Ilsa, who was like a sister to me, we had grown up together, and a number of my other friends, and there I met people who became my best friend's family to each other, my friend Liesl, my friend, Susie. One was from Vienna, and the other one from Prague. We became very close friends, and we were sent to camp called Bolkoreim. And um, strangely enough, on, on that ride from Sosnovitz from the transit camp to concentration camp, um, there was a certain lightness which I remember, and uh, I can identify it now as um, the worst has happened, and as, as tragic as it was to be separated from my parents, in a way it was um almost you know, some of my fear left me there. You know, I was always afraid that I would see something, you know, and I once saw an SS man beat my father, and, I mean those were the most horrible things. And to see my parents concern about me and their concern about each other. Now I knew that uh whatever would happen would happen to me, and uh, for some reason, I was really not afraid any longer. When I was with young girls, we went together, and then it was, was almost um something lighthearted that that happened there, and um, and I think that in itself um, I think it, it, it's much easier to bear whatever happens to you alone, not to watch someone you love, to, it's happening to them, and also to see their, their concern and pain when it's inflicted on you. This is why I think perhaps it was so much more difficult for people uh that had to suffer together. And of course, youth, you know, also is uh, you know, is resilient, that, at that point I was 18, and uh, then of course, I was in the camps for 3 years.

Q: We have one minute left.

A: I uh, we made an incredible bet on that train. That girl I met, was a, was a beautiful girl, her name was Susie Kuhns, and uh, Susie said that war is, how long, she said, to me, we stood at the window of the train, she said, "How long do you think it's going to last?" And I said, "Oh, it will be wonderful when we make the journey back. It's going to be probably less than a year," and she

said, "Ah, less than a year," she said, "No, they'll kill us first," she said. "It uh, it's going to be a long, long time." And I said, "Well, let's bet. Like make a bet," and she said, "Okay, what shall we bet for?" and she, she said, "I love strawberries, field strawberries passionately and whipped cream." I said, "Okay, then we'll bet for, for whole quarter of it," and we, we shook hands there, and made that bet. I lost the bet, but I didn't pay it. She died tragically on liberation morning. In Czechoslovakia. I don't know if she knew that we were free or not. I rather think she did not.

Q: We have to reload.

A: I'm glad.

Change film, camera roll 4 is up; Sync take 7.

Beep.

A: The camp, the camp we came to um was a small town called Bolknehein, I remember. We were marched from the railroad station. People looked very curiously at us. Uh, we came to an enclosure, uh, adjacent to the factory, which had a couple, uh, uh, uh a barrack, and um, was a tremendous click as the gates closed, sort of a finality, and there stood a woman clad all in black, and she was literally barking. I have never heard a human voice being that harsh. She looked like a bulldog, she, you know, and I said, "This is, this is going to be absolutely the worst." We were supposed to refer to her as uh Frau Kligler. She turned out to be the hope, the inspiration and the knowledge that perhaps not all Germans were cruel. She was a decent wonderful warm caring human being. No doubt she was picked for her position because of her looks, but the looks completely belied what was underneath it all. She was decent, she was good. We stayed in that camp for a little over a year. No one was sent to Auschwitz. Uh, I don't know if she particularly loved us, but uh she pinned a lie to the lips of all those who said they had no choice. I personally am indebted to her for my own life at one point when this infamous Lindner, who was known for his cruelty, should come to for an inspection of the camp, and I had been very ill at the time, I was running a very high fever, and I was permitted to stay in my bunk, and she came in with 2, no there was 3 of us who were ill, and she came in she said, "Girls, get yourself together." And I remember I couldn't put my, I had my skiing boots, and my father made me wear my skiing boots when I left home, skiing boots in June, and I blessed him for it because I wore those boots for 3 years in every season, and I remember she stooped down to tie my boots and she literally dragged me and the two other girl to the factory. She had worked in the factory before. And she set my looms in motion, and said, "Pull yourself together. This is life or death today." And, uh, before we left Germany, ---

-----the few of us who survived all left the positions that if Frau Kligler should be found, you know she might have been arrested for, for being the head of a camp, where actually she was the person who had saved many lives. And uh, she was sort of a bright light in this darkness.

Q: Uh, there was spiritual resistance when you were in that camp, and she sort of must have looked the other way, can you tell me...

A: Oh sure. You know, I mean, look, she demanded certain things, I mean I don't want to give you the impression that you know she was too--we worked very hard, you know we were, we were taught to weave, and uh, the work was very difficult, and uh, you know, you had to be very swift and that because uh, the material which we were weaving, you know, was, was very poor. The threads would break, and everything was interpreted as a sabotage. If you didn't work it like, uh skilled uh weavers would have 2 looms, we had 4 looms to watch. I mean, it was hard uh, uh backbreaking labor, but uh, but we still had some food, I mean uh you know, you, you didn't, you, you would consider it dreadful under normal circumstances, but of what was to follow later, I, I think of that as a transition period you know from uh from home and from, from love and from normalcy to, to the horror which followed, I, I think that uh that she made it bearable, you know. She did not steal any of our food. We, we got the food uh you know. If somebody was ill, as I mentioned, I was at that particular time, she let you stay on the bunk, you know. She, she, she really tried. She was a human being, and uh, and I think it was terribly important to meet a human being under those, those circumstances. You know, to a lot of people, I believe that um a concentration camp seems like a snake pit where people step on each other for survival, they stole from each other. That wasn't the case at all. And again, I speak only about the camps in which I was. And um, and I can say that I have seen the finest qualities of humanity there. The sharing and the caring, and you know, if uh, whatever one had one shared with somebody else be it a crumb of bread, or if somebody had a birthday you know, and on Sunday we sometimes got margarine on our bread. We would scrape the margarine off on Sunday from several of the pieces to save it for the person who had the birthday, to honor birthday, put some margarine on the bread, and, and things like that. My closest friend, Ilsa of whom I speak so often once found a raspberry in the ----, and she carried it in her pocket all day long, through a hot day, a raspberry, a total possession. And that night she reached out and through the barbed wire, and got a leaf and washed it, and she presented the ra-raspberry on a leaf. It was her total possession, and people did some wonderful things there, and those are the things that I want to remember. You know, and we had very little time, of course, you know, and most, most of the time we were very tired. Whatever free time we had, but that was used if somebody remembered of seeing a, a particular film or ballet or something, it was shared, and you know, and an acted out, and um, oh there, there was an

enormous support system there, and um, it, it that really was the, the other side to survival, that on one hand we experienced extreme cruelty, and on the other hand, incredible love and friendship, and there was a balance there, and there was hope there, you know. And somehow you um, you know, you saw of, of them, the Nazis like um, you know, I, I would fantasize to, to look like a snake or this and that, I mean you didn't think of them as human, but you could identify the others as human being. I always thought of them as below my contempt, you know, and this is how you could somehow take it. Sometimes, of course, you fell under the spell of it, you know, when they would march you out and, and tell you that you'll be here all your life and this and that, and I always said, you know, you can fall under that, you know, you have to imagine how uh, how they will look dead and things like that, you know, and I was spinning fantasies, and, and that helped. Now again, you know, you, you have to be very young at that time or with a very vivid imagination, which fortunately I had so um, you know, I, I could sort of often lift myself out of that and imagine different things, and, and almost, almost anything could conjure this type of picture sometimes, you know the um, I remember you know working on the looms and we had overhead lights and the way um sometimes the light fell on the loom, I could remember that light coming through to my window in the morning when I was a child waking up, and then I could build a whole picture around that and black out everything that was around me. And I lived sort of in, in a world, you know, you could live on 2 levels, there's, there's no problem about that. And I guess even now I do live on two levels, you know, sometimes the other one comes up and makes it a little more difficult when uh, when that intrudes, but most of the time you can, you can keep it down.

Q: Is this where the play was?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Tell me about that.

A: Well um, uh, when Christmas again it was under Frau Kigler's uh time, uh during Frau Kigler's time, I think Christmas and New Ye--and um, Hannukah sort of fell together, and so we had to clean the factory. In those days we were allowed a hot shower after that was over and that was the best shower I ever remember, it was hot because no, we, we didn't have hot showers, we were permitted to shower once a week cold shower, but this was a hot shower, sort of a special deal, and uh, we were going to put on a play because everybody else was busy and Frau Kigler, we did not worry with her very much about you know because we did throw some things in Polish and of course she didn't understand Polish, so that was okay. Uh, my friend Ilsa and I um staged a play, and others of course participated in it as well. Some people had wonderful singing voices and danced, so we were going to have a performance, and um, this particular play dealt with 2

grandmothers. Ilsa and I were two grandmothers in that play. Um, we gathered some um stuff from under the looms and put it on our hair to make it grey, and we had found little pieces of wire, and made such granny glasses, and um, I wrote that play in, in the washroom at night, and the next day we performed it. We were sitting near the clearing between the bunks. There was a clearing there, we had pushed the tables aside, and we were talking about the wars, the past, of course, you know, predicting great futures for everyone, and um, I still remember uh, uh the words of the play. One of my friends who as a matter of fact lives in Los Angeles reminded me of, of that particular thing, and then we had our two granddaughters come up and they listened to us for a while, you know, sort of with a bored look, and they said, "Oh, uh, come on let's talk about old boyfriends. You know how old people exaggerate." And so we were 17 and 18 respectively at that particular time. We somehow seemed to have hit upon the very core of existence. That someday we will live in a place where Jewish grandmothers will be allowed to live, and Jewish grandchildren will live, but best of all, to live in a place where the climate will be such that our children and grandchildren will not believe our tales of the past. The person who played my granddaughter in that play is alive; she's in Israel. She is the mother of one of Israel's most decorated heroes. Tragically, the person who played Ilsa's granddaughter is not alive, just as Ilsa is not alive, and neither are the faces that I remember looking at ----- . We performed it on the one naked, very d----- walk??? in the clearing between the bunks. And it's probably, in retrospect, one of the most rewarding moments of my life, I have been able to make them forget, even for an hour.

Q: We have to reload.

Sound roll 3; Wentworth Films; Holocaust; 7-1/2 IPS; 60 cycle sync; 3/13/92; Scottsdale, AZ;
Camera roll 5 is up; Sync take 8 is up; We are continuing interview with Gerda Klein.

A: Um, well, I've got to get back to Boltonhein because uh, because the menorah that happened...

Beep.

A: Um, during the time when we uh, did the play, we also fashioned a menorah out of our evening meal of potatoes. We cut it very carefully, and uh, we had sort of a dilemma. Should we try to find, of course we had no candles, but then we thought even if we had candles, that it would be more symbolic to sort of light the flame of hope within us, without seeing it and that will be the unseen things, and uh, and we uh sang so, a song, about Hannukah, but we reworked it, you know, to, to a modern then version of this new hopeful menorah and of, of the defiance of, of the Macabees??? and uh the little bit of oil, which lasted for 7 days when it was supposed to last only

one night, so you know, we applied it to us, and we, we felt very, very strongly about that. Um, we also did some other things like uh, Yom Kippur when, when we were admonished it, not depressed, and not to deliver the prescribed quota of material. Everyone fasted even though we knew that uh the dire consequences if you did not do it, which was difficult even under most normal circumstances. Um, and uh, we were given noodles and sugar at some point. Nobody ate it. And, um, there was a feeling of of oh of almost holiness and tranquility, um, um, you know it, it, it was a very important victory within you. Yes, you can do it, and that was a victory over, over them, over the Nazis. We could do it within ourselves, and uh, we did a number of, of ,of uh, of things like that. Um, I remember when they were particularly vicious. Not Frau Kigler, but the ones, you know, that were coming in to, to give us the pep talks. There was particularly one Meister Zimmer, whom I absolutely detested, and he was totally bored. He was very intelligent, and uh, spoke marvelously well, I mean, he had almost an hypnotic voice, and he would say that if we stayed all our lives, we would learn a decency and things, and he, he just drove me crazy with this type of thing because decency was the thing that that I felt my parents lived by and to, to hear it mouthed by him, it became an ugly thing, and I remember what, what I us---uh, as soon as I was starting to fall under his spell, I imagined his ears were sort of protruding a bit, and I imagined how he would look dead, and how worms would come out of his ears, and I remember once I must have smiled to myself because he said to me, "What, what are you smiling about?" I didn't know I was smiling. So, um you ,you could take certain things and turn it around, and feel that in your mind, you had a certain victory over the things that that they were saying, and I thought to myself, "Mmm, sure, he will die long before I will, and I will do such and such," and um, it was probably very childish, but I think it worked. It sometimes could work very, very well. You could lift yourself above what was there. I remember in one of my ----- very much later, um, that I was busy on the death march, you know, on, on...

Q: Let's go, let's...

A: No, I should leave that one out because that.

Q: No, we're going to do the death march, but we'll do it later.

A: No, because I have this one particular thing that, should I do it later? Sorry, you'll probably cut it.

Q: Do it now.

A: Okay. We didn't get anything to eat for days, literally. We were bitter cold and hungry and everything and um, I was planning a party after the war, and I had the dilemma for almost an entire day if I should have a blue velvet dress or a red velvet dress. Couldn't resolve it. I really liked the color blue much better as a color, but I knew that red looked better on me, so uh, well, you could occupy your mind and hang your thoughts on trivia of that nature. It became very important, and this is how you passed the hours and forgot the hunger and, and the cold. And I uh, I do believe that if you were blessed with imagination that that you could work that. Um, if unfortunately you were a person that faced reality, I think you didn't have much of a chance. I felt I was lucky because I never faced reality. I still don't. Uh, but when we went, um, when we had to leave Boltonheim, which was very hard. We, we left for another camp because we did not have enough uh, raw material to, to do any weaving. Um, Boltonheim had a sort of a sister uh factory called, uh, there were several, one of Landeshut, and one was Medsdorf, and so and we were sent to Medsdorf. Medsdorf was a horrible camp by comparison with Boltonheim. First of all we were housed in, in a bldg maybe on the 6th or 7th or 8th floor, way up and it was terribly hot there, it was middle of the summer. And of course the windows were nailed down, I mean, we were literally broiling there, and the people in charge there were in complete contrast to what we knew about Frau Kigler. There was a Lager Feuhrer in there, who was perhaps 18 or 19 years old, the most vulgar-looking thing. Uh, she was wearing rings on every finger, and then sometimes 2 or 3 rings on each finger, and she had short stubby red hands, and her enjoyment was to, she had a little cart, like children right around, and she would sit in that cart with a little whip, and we had to um pull her. That was her, her joy, I mean, the mentality of that person was, was not to be believed. And then there was another person there, who was in charge of us, and she had been um, a guard in one of the female um jails, and we sometimes had, and the work that we did, um, people who were, who committed some, some sort of misdemeanor or what have you, in jail, came to spend a day working with us. And that was our normal work. Um, we worked at different jobs there. Um, one of the jobs, which was uh dreadful. There were several that were bad. One was to um hand a bricks one to another, and we were to throw the brick and, and catch it quickly. If you didn't, it landed on your hands, and uh, it crushed your fingers. The other job was to go in a nearby swamp because they were growing linen there, and in the swamp, you had to put um, uh, the li--the not finished linen, the thing that had grown into the swamp to because then it opened, uh, the enclosure in which the threads, the lin--, the linen was--I don't know if I'm explaining it right--that was backbreaking labor. You had to stand in the swamp doing that, and that's was swarming with mosquitoes, and then other thing that we did is uh load into a silo, an enormous silo, I don't know how many stories high, um, a man with a crane was throwing down bundles, and we were standing on that, and you know the bundles uh, came crashing down, and you had to arrange them, and you could easily be swallowed up in that, first of all, you were swaying all the time, and uh, and then

they came so fast that if you didn't catch it fast enough, it hit you and it pricked your skin, and then, then your skin was bleeding, and then you were in the swamp, and the mosquitoes were eating in it. It was a horrible time, and it was there in that silo where some of the women came from jails who had committed murder or God knows what, as punishment for a day, and they said they preferred solitary anytime than to work there. Um, it was there as a matter of fact where I uh, really felt I was going to give up. There was one overseer who uh was particularly cruel to me, and he had singled me out for uh for this type of punishment. So, during the day, I was working with flax or uh -----the bundles. At night we had to shovel coal. And wagons, uh you know, came loaded with coal, we had to shovel it because tracks had to be cleared, and it was going on day and night. Once we saw the trains going by we didn't know if there were trains with uh with German soldiers going back, and people said there were trains of people we sent to Auschwitz. And um, and I remember my resistance really weakening there, and I thought to myself once after the um, the cold car was empty and I was with that, standing on that, with that shovel in my hand, and I, I said it would be so easy now to jump. An oncoming train, and it would be over in, in a couple seconds, and become a part of that stillness like we have to face tomorrow. It's, it's going to be tomorrow. It's going to be flax in the morning and, and the bundles at night, and, and the swamp again, and the hunger, and that I, I, I just felt I had enough. And I, I resisted that, and then, another day came by and the next night it uh, and I remember too, you know, I had promised my father, there was one thing I was never going to, to do is, is to really give up. It was sort of a, but, but there I came very close to doing it, and I remember that one night, when I definitely saw that it was a beautiful moonlit night, and I said to myself, "It's time to do it." And I heard very faint oncoming of a train, very far away probably. And suddenly I felt a pain in my both sides of my, my neck, very sharp, and um, it was right in the beginning of the war when we not heard from my brother and my mother was sick, and we were told that we had to leave with 20 lbs of our belongings. Our home. And I remember standing there, and we heard of a family who committed suicide together, and I sort of half-wished that my parents had suggested that. I was also very close to my father, and I remember I stood there, and was thinking about that. My father must have guessed my thoughts because he came up to me, stood behind me and he said, "What you are thinking is, is cowardly and is wrong." And he said, "Promise me that you are never going to do it." I didn't answer him. And he took my head, as he stood behind me and he turned me back forcefully toward him.

Q: We have to reload.

Change film to camera roll 6; Sync take 9 is up.

Beep.

Beep.

Q: Second Sticks???

A: Uh, very early in the war while we were still at home, as a matter of fact, we were still living in, in our own quarters. It was shortly after my brother was taken away. And my, my mother was really gone to pieces. She was quite ill. And my father had the recurring, recurring thing with his heart. And we got orders to leave our home with 20 pounds of our belongings, and my father told me to sort of pack suitcases, I had no idea how to do that. And I, we had heard of a family who committed suicide together, and uh I, I really thought at that point that that, that would be good, to do that, and I had hoped that my parents would suggest that. And I remember standing at the window, and thinking about that. And my father came up behind me, and uh he, he always knew what I was thinking and he, he said to me, "What what you were thinking is, is wrong. It's cowardly, it's, it's terrible. He said, "You promise me never to do that no matter what." And I didn't answer him, and then he, he sort of took me, he took my head, like that, and he turned it toward me, toward him, and he looked at me, and he said, "I want your promise now. And I said, "Papa I promise." And uh, during those last days in Meds Dorf, that promise became pretty faint. I, I, I was, I was exhausted, you know, I don't know how, uh anymore, how many days and nights I, I was working in that heat, in, in the swamp, and uh, and the cold, and the just everything ----- together, and I, I, I really wanted to, to end it. And at that precise moment when I really most decided it, I mean, I don't know if I would have carried it through or not, but I have a feeling that I that I was pretty much at the, at the end of my rope there. And I knew that the train was going to come, and I figured, I, I'm going to jump. Suddenly I felt that very sharp pain in my neck. And the promise came back, and obviously I didn't. Strange thing is, the following day, everything changed. The following as we were working in the swamp, um, that overseer, that that fury came running and had a list in her hand, and asked the people who had the following numbers to come forward. And I, I, I think my mind must have been so muddled, I wasn't even thinking, um, and Ilsa's number was called, she was working with me. See, Ilsa was not working nights, uh, at that was sort of directed more against me or, or a few other people, and he called Ilsa's number, and nobody raised their hands, and she said, "Well who has that number?" And Ilsa took my hand and she said, "She did." I wasn't even aware of what she was doing. She obviously was substituting her number for mine. She wanted to save me from something. And I was led away, and Ilsa jumped out of -----, and she also started running, and as we came to the courtyard of the camp, there stood the director of the factory of Boltonheim, and uh, Ilsa literally threw herself at, at his feet, and she said, "I want to go with my sister." So he said, "What is your number?" Then she

gave her correct number and mine, and he said, "Well you both are on the list." So he said, "You run and wash up you, you look like pigs," uh, and actually what was happening is they needed more people for weaving and he came to collect from this particular camp, which was not a weaving factory, to an adjacent one called Landeshoot, which was also under the auspices of Boltonheim, and uh, again we were loaded on a truck, and I couldn't wait for the gates to open, to get out of that, I, I didn't know how to thank Ilsa for it, but I remember that I, I just said to her, "I'm glad I didn't jump." And she said, "What did you say?" And I said, "I'll tell you someday." I never told her.

Q: How did that Lager Feuhrer have it in for you?

A: Um, I, I can only surmise um I, I was cleaning some, some small component in the camp and, and he came up--he, he wasn't a lager fuehrer, he was, he was um, sort of a supervisor there. And he said to me, "Um how, how would you like some hot soup or some bread?" You know, which was sort of, I said, well, I said to myself, "Why is he saying that to me?" If he wanted to help me, why doesn't he give me a piece of bread?" You know. So, I sort of said, uh, "Well, I eat in camp," which I felt, you know, was, was stating the truth without accusing them that they're not giving us enough to eat, but, but not saying anything, and so I uh, I gathered that he had maybe a certain designs on me, or maybe just wanting to test me, I don't know, you know, they were, well, that, incidentally, in our camp was not much of a problem. There were a lot, uh, there were very few men around working in the camps, were mostly old, and there were a lot of young pretty German girls there, so that was, that was not a problem. I, I don't know. In any event, I think, just the type of defiance that I showed, uh he decided to sort of break my spirit, maybe out of sport or, or just to show his -----, and this is what I was picked for. For every type of, of hard work. But um, I think it's a terribly important lesson. One should never ever, ever give up. No matter how difficult a thing is you know, uh, giving up is a final solution to a temporary problem. Our problem wasn't so temporary. Nevertheless, it would pass, but one was keenly aware of the preciousness of life, and to hold on to it as long as possible, and to me, this was really the most important thing, and I would say that during that entire time that I was in the camp, was a little, I mean, except for the beginning of the war when I really did not know, and only heard that the family had chosen that path together. This was the only incident that I remember, through all the years, that I really came close to calling it quits. That's why I love to say to young people, never ever, ever give up. The darker the night, the brighter the dawn, and it sure was bright. And it sure was dark.

Q: I want to jump back to your 18th birthday, what your mother did.

A: My 18th birthday was literally a few weeks, my birthday is May 8th, and on the 29th, 28th and 29th of January, the 29th I left, I was separated from my mother on the 28th and my father, it was about 5 weeks before, so that was my last birthday. And uh, my mother decided to have a party. She invited a number of my friends and she somehow had gotten some oatmeal, and baked some cookies, which we all swore tasted marvelously well, like almonds, and um, my parents gave me an incredible present. They gave me an orange. I've always loved oranges. And of course, then an orange in the ghetto was, was impossible. I later learned that my mother had given a very treasured and very valuable ring for that orange, and that was the last present I got from my parents.

Q: Tell me about your brother-----.

A: My brother was almost two and a half years older than I, and he uh, he was really my hero. My brother was very good looking, and people used to say, uh, my mother was a very beautiful woman. People used to say, "It's a shame she has such a beautiful mother, and that she looks like her father, but the boy looks so much like the mother." So you know, I always sort of grew up in the shadow of my brother, who was extremely good-looking and very accomplished, and everything he touched he seemed to be able to do well, and we fought at times, but by and large, he was a wonderful brother. He always protected me, and uh, and of course, he had his friends coming to the house, and there were boys around you know, and I, I started to get interested in boys. And a lot of my friends were seeking my friendship because of my brother. And um, the first day when the Nazis came in there, rounded up people they would find, and put them in the temple, and set the temple on fire, that was really the first, the first deed, the first horror which was inflicted upon the citizens of the town. And it was shortly before my brother was taken away when he had to go to register at uh what was like the community center, which was not too far from the temple. The temple had been destroyed. Of course. And I went with my brother. I don't remember if it was now on the way to where to register, or on the way back, I rather think it was on the way back. We passed by the temple, and we climbed over the debris, and we were sitting there talking, and was sort of he, he talked to me very seriously. You know, usually he, he talked down to me a bit, but it was more like an equal, and uh, it was one uh, pillar of the temple that stood on all the destruction, and he said to me, "Look at that one." He said, "It survived. We are going to survive. They can't do it to us." And then, he picked up a couple of little stones, which were charred, and he put one in his pocket and he gave me one, and he said, "I want you to carry it with you all the time, to remind you of, of this. Of the temple and our conversation." And I, I carried it with me, but uh, later on, on that death march, I must have lost it someplace, I carried it in a little sack. I had sewn a little sack, and I, I carried it on, on my neck with a string. I, I lost it.

Q: We're about to run out.

Sound roll 4; Wentworth Films; Holocaust; 7-1/2 IPS; (pause)

Sound roll 4; Wentworth Films; Holocaust; 7-1/2 IPS; 60 cycle sync; March 13, 1992; Camera roll 7 is up; Sync take 10 is up; Scottsdale, AZ; Continuing interview with Kurt Klein.

Beep.

A: Where do I start?

Q: Start with the death march.

A: I don't remember where I finished at.

Q: Just start with the death march.

A: Sort of getting a little...Well...three years in the camp became progressively worse as um, raw material was running out, and also as uh it seemed that the war was taking a different turn. We sort of knew that if Germany should be victorious, our doom is going to be sealed. But if, for what we prayed for that, that we would be liberated, we were afraid that when things start turning uh bad for them, they are going to let uh their, their venom and their frustrations out on us, so that was really a no win situation. It became pretty obvious in the winter of 1944 as it turned to 45, when um, uh there were fr-a frequent um we heard planes coming in and, and uh, uh production stopped, and things were, were getting bad, and then on the night of the 28th, rather the day of the 28th of January, 45, we did not go to work. Was a workday, and we did not go to work. We were told to stay in camp. And toward evening we heard an enormous commotion, and uh, a transport of 2000 girls came from Auschwitz, mostly Hungarian girls. They told us they had been marching, that um, Auschwitz, uh the Russian front had moved closer, Auschwitz was being liberated, and they were running away from the advancing Russian army. And uh, we, we were going to join that march the next morning. Was bitter cold. Was in January. And I was coughing terribly, I had a very bad cold. And my 3 dearest friends, Susie Kuhns, Lizzy Schteburn, Ilsa Klein Zeller and I, we hurried together the four of us, and they, they were very concerned about me, they said, "You know, if you can only pull through with that terrible cold and the terrible cough," like the pneumonia or what have you. And in the morning, very early, the doors opened, not to the type of freedom we had hoped, but it opened to an, an incredible picture. There was freshly fallen snow for as far as the eye could see. And an enormous sort of it was a plateau, and then it came up to, to a gentle hill, and it

was just, just covered with snow. It was grey, it was snowing, and uh we were told to uh assemble for a -----, so of course, there was the four of us, and uh we held hands, and we took the first step, and I guess we all knew that this was going to be the first step to the end of the road. Either to liberation or to, to doom. And in front of us stretched this incredible line. Well, people looked you know with, with grey uh camp blankets over them, and they looked like winged death. That's all you could see. Way, way ahead, four thousand girls. And on the side were the SS men and the SS women, and they lifted their whips and they said, "Forward march." And we started to march. Started to march, it was the 29th of January. And we, we left a lot of girls back in the snow. And they were killed. That was something one can barely, can really not describe. My father had asked me when I last saw him in June the very last day, practically in the last moment, before he left, he said to me, "Where are your skiing boots?" I said, "Why?" And he said, "I want you to wear them today." I said, "Papa, skiing shoes in June?" He said, "I want you to wear them." One didn't argue with one's father. So I put on those boots and I wore them throughout my entire stay in the camps for 3 years, and in them I'd also hidden the pictures of my parents and my brother. I didn't know, and I don't know how my father could have known that those boots were really instrumental in saving my life on that march. I had ski shoes. Some girls had sandals. We slept outside. The frost, I saw girls breaking off their toes like twigs. And I had my ski boots. On the 29th of April, rather I should say on the 28th, Ilsa wasn't well at all. She was sort of hallucinating. She was saying things which, I didn't know what she meant. And uh, when we stopped for the night, if a lot of girls, they put -----, the girls who had died, I dragged away from there, and I, and she didn't seem to know what was going on. But then she became totally lucid, and one of the most shocking things was that one of my other friends had somehow found two potatoes. And she gave them to me, she said, "It's for you and for Ilsa." I gave Ilsa the potato and she said she wasn't hungry. That's the most incredible statement, not to be hungry. And she said to me, "You eat it." And then she said, she said, "I'm angry at no one. I hope nobody is angry at me." And then she said, "If my parents and kitty, kitty, was her little sister," she said, "If they survive, don't tell them how I died." And she said to me, "You'll be alone." She said, "But you have always been lucky." And I begged her not to say it, but she did. And she said she wanted some water, and there was a little brook nearby, so I -----, and I wanted to, to get it, and an SS man came, and he shoved me, and I begged him to let me have water for her, and he kicked her head. So, it was raining and sort of, so I caught some water in my hands and gave it to her, and I held her, and we both fell asleep. I woke up, and she didn't.

Q: Did she make you promise to hold out?

A: Give me a break.

Beep.

Q: She asked me to promise her two things. One that her parents and Kitty survive, not to tell them how she died, and the second promise concerned me. She asked me to promise her to go on for one more week. She said, "You have to promise me. No matter what, you will hang on for another week." Little did I know that a week later, exactly to the day, maybe even to the hour of her death, we were liberated."

A: Tell me how the four of you pretended things on the death march.

Q: Well, not so much on the march, it was before we, we had particularly Liesl and I. Susie um, uh, Susie faced things much more, it was uh, it was Susie who said, "We probably won't have a chance. They will kill us first." But, um, but Liesl and I uh, we had a wonderful game. You know, we could play a game, and just uh fall into the game while, while we were still in camp and we worked on the night shift. At one stretch we worked for 9 months on the night shift, and um, I remember waking up and it was raining. We uh, the camp had over, had like a factory you know, uh, then the windows were on top, and you could hear the patter of the rain, and we must have both woken up at the same time, and um, and she said, "Oh it's a rainy day." And I said, "Yeah, but I've got to get up, you know, I have an appointment." And she said, "I have an appt with the dressmaker." I said "Yes," but she said "I've got to go first out to the garden and pick up some green apples. They taste wonderful after the rain." And then she would say, "You know, I, I need a new raincoat, and I have to do this, and then I uh, and then my mother expects me to clean up my room and you know, we would use the, the ordinary would suddenly become extraordinary, but we could go on like this for hours, spinning the sort of tales which totally blocked out reality, and made the, the horror around us, you know, would disappear. And um, I think it was those things which uh, which helped enormously, survival. Didn't know you, you dredged them up from some, sometimes from recesses of whatever of your, of your mind, and the other thing became the abnormal. We were right back there. We blocked everything else out and um, and then also was uh, uh, I mean, uh, there was some humor, there was some, there was laughter.

A: Wait, I want to do that-----reload.

Change film, camera roll 8 is going up; Sync take 12 is up.

Beep.

A: There was laughter, there was um, innocent fun, and don't forget uh, we were a group of young girls, and um, you know we could play games of pretend, you know. I think we ----- to a certain perfection. We could just, just go on and on and on, and um, it,

A: This is a bad plane. Let's just stop.

Q: Where do we go from here now?

A: 13 is up.

Beep.

Q: Tell me about the laughter.

A: There was laughter in the camps, there were, there was joking, there, there were funny stories, there were things that uh, that lightened our burden. You do not live through 3 years like that without those gallows humor but uh, but humor nevertheless, and um, we played the games of pretending, we did it very well. Some, some better the others, you know, some people were never part of it, and said, you know, "You are crazy, you're insane," but we did it mostly Liesl and I. Um, um, Ilse was much more serious. Ilse was a musician, she was a very fine pianist. At a very early age, she was sent to Vienna to study at the conservatory of music. She really showed enormous promise pianist. Uh, Susie was by far the most intellectual of the group, and probably the most mature. Um, she had lost her mother when, uh when she was a baby, and I think she, she was much more serious, uh, Liesl and I both had older brothers, and um, were younger sisters, and I, I think we had more of a sense of fun and, and uh, she was, incidentally, she was dressed beautiful, she was probably one of the most beautiful girls I had ever seen. Uh, Susie was a redhead with green eyes. Liesl was dark and enormous dark eyes, -----also. And um, I was the happy one in the group, there were, all 3 were just beautiful girls. Um, in a way we had much in common and we sort of supported um each other, we, we made a lot of fun of, of each other as well, and of others, if the truth must be told, but it was all part of it, it established a certain, a certain normalcy, and um...

Q: Did you make fun of your guards?

A: Of course, I mean it,

(Sandy says something)

Q: Uh, well, well, there were wonderful ways of cursing them for instance, one of which was he should, he should become an onion, uh, was it an onion? Yeah I guess so, with, with the head, with the head buried in the ground and uh, I, I don't remember some of these things. Oh, one of the favorite things was we, we called them a lamp, and was a lamp because during the day, he should hang, and at night he should burn, uh things like that, was not, not particularly attractive, but um, was one of those things, and uh, we mostly did caricatures of them. You know, of um, of what they looked like and we, we give them certain names. Um, I don't recall some of the names anymore, but imagine them in different settings and um, and we didn't think highly of them, to be sure. Uh, the ones which, which were most, most threatening were, were the others like uh, uh Meister Zimmer and so on, who had a different approach to it, you know, the one who regarded us as uh, as complete idiots, and uh, talked down to us as, as if we were we didn't know the most elementary things. That was much easier to take, you know, because we looked down on them. Uh, the others, who had much higher intellect, and who knew exactly where to where to hurt and what type of things to say, that was more difficult to take. But, by and large, I think we, we were able to do that. And that would only become sort of as a support system, you know, one talked to the other about it, you know, and, and say, you know, this, this idiot uh gave us some talking today, listen, listen to that one, I mean, things like that. Um, it was pretty bitter, by and large, but um, but in a way we could laugh it away. And of course, you know, that constant um, uh, uh, radio broadcast, which was broadcast through the camp, which usually started with um, with a melody. We knew when that started, whenever it went, -----: We are, we are going against England. And, following that uh, that little musical interlude always came and announcement of the incredible victories which they had won. And, that was pretty hard to take.

Q: Did you get news from the outside?

A: No, nothing at all.

Q: Did you do any sabotage?

A: No, that would have been foolish. What type of sabotage can we do? We'd make a hole in one of the clothes and, and be killed for that. We'd all throw the clothes away, I mean... I mean, for that we were too realistic to see that, -----we were very little that we could. We were totally in their hands. Totally depended on their whims. Everyone had the power of life and death over you.

Q: Were they following orders?

A: I don't know. What is from where, from what -----, Mrs. Kigler showed that orders could be interpreted in a different uh way, but I think it was the individual cruelty, which hurt so much because it was so unnecessary.

Q: Retell as though you didn't tell it before your bet with Susie in the beginning. Give a little description of her and the bet you had for the quart of strawberries.

A: Tell it again?

Q: Tell it again. We ran out actually before you were finished.

A: It was on the way from um the transit camp in Sosnovitz to the first camp in Boltonheim when we were on the train, and uh, this is actually where I met Susie. She introduced herself, she was a tall, very pretty girl, with auburn hair, and two freckles on her nose, very open uh face, and um, she introduced herself as Susie Kuhns, she had come from Vienna. Her mother had died when she was a baby. Her grandmother lived in, in Czechoslovakia, and uh she spent a great deal of her life in the care of her grandmother, where she was when the war started, in the fall, and um, uh, I said something to the effect, "Wouldn't it be wonderful when we make that journey back." And she said, "We'll never make that journey back," and I said, "Of course we will." Uh, she said, "That war will drag on forever," and I said, "That war is going to be over in less than a year." So, well, she said, um, something to the effect, "You are either very stupid or very hopeful." Something like that. So, I said, "Let's make a bet then." And she said, "okay." So we made a bet for a quart of whole?? strawberries, were little,-----, they were called, and uh, and whipped cream. I lost the bet. I never paid the debt. Because Ilsa died on liberation morning. I found her dead. I didn't know if she knew that we were free or not. She was an incredible girl.

Q: Now tell me again the story of the raspberry in the context of human spirit. I know about it, I know about it, just, just---Yeah, you said Ilsa died instead of Susie.

A: No, I said, no, I said Ilsa, I said Ilsa.

Q: Yeah, you said Ilsa.

A: Unfortunately they both did. What did you want me to say now.

Q: See, I'm thinking about how much film I have.

Sound roll 5; Wentworth Films; Holocaust; 7-1/2 IPS; 60 cycle sync; March 13, 1992; Scottsdale, AZ; Continuing interview with Gerda Klein; Camera roll 9 is up; Sync take 14 is up.

Beep.

(Sandy asks question, can't hear).

A: I didn't. Not until you just mentioned it.

Q: Okay, we're ready.

A: Okay.

Q: So tell me about liberation.

A: Well this was the very last phase of the war when we were on this death march, which started on the 29th of January in Greenberg, in Silesia. We sort of, our, our destination actually was Oranenburg, Oranenburg was a murder camp near Berlin. Oranenburg fell into the hands of the Russians, and we were zig-zagging through Germany, ending in Czechoslovakia in a tiny place called -----, where the march came to a halt. Um, Ilsa had died just a week before. It was evening, and um, one of the SS women came by and she mentioned to one of my friends to take my boots off, which sort of signaled you know the last thing. My friend, her name was Hanna Kudlidsky, Hanna Keller in those days, told me that, and she said, "Hide. Don't let her see you." And um, a truck came, and she said to me, "You know, you better get on that truck so she shouldn't see you." And I said, "You know I'm, I'm in no hurry." And I remember sitting there and, and really knowing that this was definitely the end. Heard American planes overhead, there was shooting, and the the German army was running away, there were people on the roads with children with animals, tremendous chaos, and uh, I was sitting there and it, it was really a beautiful night, it was May, it suddenly got a little warmer, and uh, and I permitted myself the luxury of thinking of home, of my parents of my, my brother in a different sense. I always thought of home, but um, but somehow this was different. The truck didn't come back for us, and they came, and

there was this enormous factory, we were sort of in front of it, and they it was in the they locked the doors, and was told that they planted a time bomb to, to blow us up--won't fall into the hands of whoever were coming. We didn't know if it would be the Russians or the Americans or what. I uh, I must have been pretty sick during that night. I um, uh, only isolated things which, which I remember, when I remember that we, we tried to break out of there, and we couldn't, the doors were really locked and, and chains were put around it and everything. And uh, it started to rain. Torrential rain, which obviously somehow um, the bomb and ----- did not connect. And then we are told that they're coming back. I remember crawling in into one of those long um chimney, a cylinder that was on the floor, and a few of us crawled in there, and there was some shooting, I remember a bullet went by, and then it was quiet again, and then the doors, must have been the following morning, the doors were opened, the Czech people called and said the war was over. Uh, I, I didn't understand the reality of, of that at all. My , uh, then there were some Americans that night before, but my two um impact of...of freedom and of it being over actually must have happened that following morning. I do know that the SS had run away, and they had changed their uniforms into civilian clothes. I did find um one of those great coats, from the army, and I wrapped, wrapped myself in it and, and tried to sleep on the floor. I must have been quite feverish, I was already I think quite ill, and it was the following morning that it, I, as I said we met the Americans the night before, but I think, but all that some-somehow sinks into oblivion. My, my very clear um, view of ,of freedom and liberation came that morning when I stood in this doorway of that abandoned factory. And I saw a car coming around the hill. And the reality of that came when I saw the white star on its hood and not the swastika. There were two men in that car. One jumped out, came running toward me and asked if there was anyone who spoke English or German. I told him I spoke German. I remember that aura of him, of that awe, of, of disbelief, in daylight to really see someone who fought for our freedom, for my ideals, and uh, he looked like, like God to me. And I uh, I knew what I had to say, and I said to him, "We are Jewish, you know." For a very long time, at least to me it seemed very long, he didn't answer me, and then his own voice betrayed his emotion, he was wearing dark glasses I couldn't see his eyes, he said, "So am I." And the impact of that to be liberated not only by an American, but by a fellow Jew, um, it, it, it just, so totally uh, I mean, um, I think this is when that that feeling of such an incredible joy which fills your, your whole, whole being. It, it, it must have, just burst out, I, I, I remember I couldn't get a hold of myself then. But then he said, asked a strange question. He said, "May I see the other ladies?" A form of address we hadn't heard for six years." I told him that most of the girls were inside and were too ill to walk. He said to me, "Won't you come with me." I didn't know what he meant. So he, he held the door open for me and let me proceed in. And that was the moment of restoration of, of humanity of humaneness, dignity and freedom. And this first young American of liberation day is now my husband. He opened not only the door for me, but the door to my life and

my future. I took him to see my friends, but I was very sad because that morning I went to look for Susie, because Liesl said to me, "Susie went out to get some water, and she has not returned." So I went out to look for her, and I found her near the pond. I thought she had fainted, and I touched her, and she was cold. I wanted to tell her, "Susie," and I did tell her, I said, "Susie, we are liberated, we are free." We had made a bet more than three years earlier on a train which took us to camp. A bet for a quart of strawberries and cream to be payable after the war. I said we will be liberated, and she said we would not. I didn't tell Liesl. I couldn't tell her. Liesl was very sick. We all were very sick, we were immediately taken to a field hospital in ----- before a school house. We were very, very ill. I weighed 68 pounds. My hair was white, so I was going to be 21 the following day. I was told that Liesl had trouble with her legs. She had uh been injured, uh, she had been shot in the leg. And I asked to see her, and was told that I was too sick to, to go there and couldn't walk. I kept asking and asking, and I sort of collapsed for quite a while. And finally I was told that she had died. Of the four of us, I was alone. I was the one that had the cold and they were all concerned about me that I would not make it, and I was the only one who, who survived. The only one from my family, the only one of my dearest friends.

Q: Tell me about the numbers of the girls that started out and the number of girls who -----.

A: About 4,000 when we started. 2,000 from our camp. 2,000 that came from Auschwitz. When they were on the way, there were certain divisions, we had stopped in other camps, and a few of the girls had had run away, most of them who had run away, uh were caught and executed. A few however managed to escape, and uh,------. I'm, I'm not sure of the exact number. Uh, when we were in the hospital, we were about 120 of this entire transport. Of those, quite a few still died. There is now a cemetery in Volari, Czechoslovakia where we were liberated. There were 95 or 96, 96 graves, but 95 of our girls were ------. I thought I made liberation such a happy story and I find it didn't turn out that way.

Change film, camera roll 10 is up; Sync take 15.

Beep.

Q: I want you to talk to me about the legacy, the goodness that you saw in -----, and feel free to retell the raspberry story, or other examples that you've done before as though you hadn't told before. Tell me when. Now.

A: Now? Looking back now over almost half a century, it is half a century, um, I think one is

struck by the nobility of the spirit which also lived in this darkness. The act of kindness, the type of support, the selflessness and the love, which I think was the support system to be able to endure that. A belief in something. Not, uh the inhumanity of, of our um captors, but, but the humanity which existed in the victims. And there was a great deal of that. My friend Ilsa, who gave me that raspberry, she carried it in her pocket all day long on a hot incredible day, and derived joy of giving it to me. Um, the one time when we uh stood roll call for, for a long time, and a piece of bread sailed over the barbed wire into our group and one of the girls caught it, and we all knew whence it came and who had it. And we were all questioned, we were all beaten, no one gave the person away. If someone which became much more difficult later when we were not with Mrs. Kigler any anymore, who had showed such humanity, but later on when really cruelty and bestiality was the reign, um, one helped the other. You know, if somebody couldn't work or was sick, you know, we, we all tried to, to help the other person, to pull them through. Um, and, and that was taken absolutely for granted. Now I don't mean to say that that everyone there was, was angelic. I mean uh, we were human, but by and large, and this is why, you know, when I wrote my first book, to me it was the most important thing to be able to put on that it is all based on truth, I used all names, all places, and I whatever I have written, I always use my maiden name as well as my married name. I want anyone to challenge the truth of that statement. Unfortunately so few stories you know survived. Um, so little has been said about that, you know because the overwhelming thing there of course was uh, was so horrible, and, and when one tries to um, to explain the holocaust, it uh, it is a horror which um, which has the upper hand because such horror has, has never, uh, never been done to, to, to people with so, that somehow what seems to escape are the little acts of kindness, the everyday thing, which, which really spurred the spark of hope that one had to have in order just to go on. And that was the, and I don't know of anyone who committed suicide. The camp was surrounded by barbed wire, which was electrically charged. Not one person that I know of ever went and touched it. So we certainly had enough reason to, to do it quickly. No one did. Everyone wanted to live with, with every fiber of one's being, and I think that was a defiance. They wanted us dead, but we are going to live for as long as we possibly can. And we did, and this is why it is so sad, that when one sees pictures of concentration camp, one sees those big vacant eyes over the barbed wire, people who look more like animals than as human beings and no one seems to know what was going on uh in the minds and hearts of the people, that they were looking at something beautiful. I remember one time, a, a bird flew into camp, and it perched itself on a bunk and started to sing. No, no one ever had a more appreciative audience than that bird did, and how, how we watched its flight then to freedom over, over the barbed wire and ov-ov-over the camp, and one time in Greenberg, uh, where we also stood for hours roll call. Uh, one spring, in the corner of this courtyard, the among the debris of the cement, a flower poked its head, and you could see hundreds of feet shuffling around it, nobody stepped on the flower. It was something

incredible to see uh that a flower heralded sort of a new spring of, of, of -----of beauty. Now, you know, one should not need uh stay in a concentration camp to appreciation of, of beauty, but, but it was an incredible moment to see that, that many things that one sees for granted. Um, there were beautiful things there. Unfortunately, and that is always the biggest pain, that so few lived to know the joy of freedom, and that is the most painful thing. And sometimes the difficulty to, to enjoy all the things, to know how many were deprived of it. That's, that's the hardest thing. But I think if one can somehow give the legacy of the nobility to the inheritance of this new spring and new generation of children and grandchildren, who have grown up in freedom. If they can understand it and, and value it, then, they have achieved a sort of immortality. I think this is really why they have to understand something, because it is difficult. You know, millions, numbers have no meaning. It's the identification is one that counts, and if, if someone somehow today, and people who live in freedom can take the identity of just one who was deprived of it at all, and live their lives vicariously, and enjoy the things for which, which they have so hungered, I think that uh, that we will build a better world. And I have hopes for the world in spite of everything.

Q: Thank you.

The following is 30 seconds of room tone

