

I'm Sidney Elsner. Today, December 27, 1984, we're in the second segment of our interview with Hilda Prooth, a Holocaust survivor from Prague, Czechoslovakia. The project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland section. We are showing you this letter which Hilda referred to in the first segment because this is the only documentation I am aware of in which a foreign government interceded for a Jewish citizen in Prague.

Hilda was under the protection of the Swedish consulate in the years before she was taken to Theresienstadt-- that is from 1939 to 1943-- because her husband was naturally born Russian, although brought up in England. As a Russian subject, the family was protected from the laws that pertained to the Czechoslovakian Jews and the German Jews for that period.

But Hilda, tell us what the Germans wanted to get out of this. Why were they so amenable to letting the Russian citizens stay?

Because they thought they will win the war. And when they win the war, then they will exchange us, because there were Germans also in Russia, and they wanted us to exchange them for them. The Germans would come back, and maybe they would give maybe 100 to 1. This was the reason. That were for this reason brought to France in this other interned camp, because this was an exchange camp. And so we were for this purpose, we were kept.

OK. OK. Now we just want to make sure that the camera has picked up this letter, so that in the future years, if anybody's interested in the documentation or translating it, there's enough there on the film that they can do that. We'll let it run until it's necessary.

Hilda, you've now left Theresienstadt on a transport in February of 1944. Describe what that was like and where you were first taken.

It was in winter, in February, very high snow. We were five women. The oldest was 79 years old, Mrs. Korvitz. And the youngest was me. I was maybe 36 years old or something in this age, and in between.

So we had to walk an hour to the station in Leitmeritz. This was the station to Theresienstadt. And so then they brought us to Prague, in the prison, the same prison where my husband was once, where I didn't want to eat the onion soup, because it wasn't so very good. But then when I came from Theresienstadt, after our good food in Theresienstadt, I said, this is wonderful. It's a wonderful soup. Isn't this a good soup, I said to my inmates. All right.

So we had-- we were a couple of days in Theresienstadt. And then we had to go again on a transport. And we came to Linz, Austria. There were a couple of Czechs women with us, but not Jewish women. And they were with us, and their husband somewhere also for listening to the radio or something what they said. And this old woman, she sold onions somewhere without a ticket, and they arrested her. So they were with us together.

And we went to Linz. In Linz, we were there in a camp. And in a corridor, so a corridor, and we could hardly sit in this way. We had to sit, so that we could-- it was so narrow. So I said, it is so hot in here. We take off the coats, and put them all in one pile. And then suddenly came the air raid, and we had to run all out without a coat, we couldn't find it in the dark. It was dark. So we went far. They brought us over the railroad. There were the [NON-ENGLISH] worker, the [NON-ENGLISH] worker. No, no, it wasn't [NON-ENGLISH]. What I was talking about?

From Goering-- from Goering, he had this big munition factory there and all. And so we had to go far out in a bunker, and then wait till the air raids off. And then we could go back. And two days later, we were brought to Salzburg. Again, there was more people with us. They brought some two French girls along, and all kinds of Viennese girls, who didn't show up to work or something. These were all the reasons that they were with us.

So from Salzburg we went to Innsbruck. And I was in a prison train. From Innsbruck, we came then to Munich. In Munich, we went in, in the railroad station. And we came also somewhere in a prison somewhere. And there were a lot of people there. And then eight days later, there were so many air raids, there were no railroads anymore. So they had to bring us out somewhere underground. And we went again to the railroad, and again.

So we went maybe to Stuttgart or to Ulm, and everywhere were you had to make stations. Then we came to-- Bruchsal somewhere. And then we came to Metz. In Metz, it was terrible. In Metz there was an SS, they were all SS. And there was a big dog. And there was the French girls, this one, she looked a little dark hair. So they thought this was a Jewish girl. She was not.

And this SS guy, he asked her [NON-ENGLISH]. So she said--

What does that mean?

[NON-ENGLISH] What's your name? So she said [NON-ENGLISH], in French. I don't understand. One slap. So he asked again, what's your name? [NON-ENGLISH], again. And maybe also how many times you said. And she was so stubborn. And she didn't say anything. She was so hateful already. And she always said that she doesn't understand it.

I thought already then, it was this big dog, it will jump on her. So anyhow we didn't get any food. They were with us murderers were with us that came from Metz, and from all kind of prison. And they got food. And they get a blanket. We didn't get any blankets.

There were only plain wooden, like couches but wooden. And this was all where we were driven in.

Next day, they found out this girl is not a Jewish girl. So they took her out.

And when there was an air raid, we heard other people had to go down in the bunker. But we didn't. They didn't take us in the bunker. We were there. So right, we were there also maybe eight days or nine days. And we had five minutes to go in the toilet. The other one is here a pail with what you could do when nature calls, or some. Water to drink was not in there. So we were five women there lying there on this wooden thing here.

And finally, they said then they brought water in. And they said now we have to clean out for the Jews. Without the Jews here, somebody else comes in. So we have to clean this out here. So then we cleaned it out with water and all. We washed a little bit something. The next day, there came a young girl with two other guys in civil, and took us away to the station, railway station.

So I said to them-- and they were with an attache case. And they always watched us. And this old woman, the 79 years old, she couldn't hardly walk anymore. And this other one, this Miss Friedstein, she was Russian, real Russian from Moscow. And she couldn't walk anymore. She was very sick. She was a doctor.

And then there was this old lady, this 72 from Austria. She broke her wrist on the way from Theresienstadt to the station. Nobody set it to her, nothing was-- it was just growing together. And she was very painful also.

So right then, we came there. And they were always watching where we go. And I said to this one guy, in German, I said, you don't have to watch us. We don't run away. I said we are 2 and 1/2 women, this as well. Old woman they couldn't walk at all, it was me and another woman. He said it wouldn't help you at all, because we have guns and all. You wouldn't go far. I said, don't worry. We don't run away. We have nowhere to go. We are 2 and 1/2 women. The others you cannot count.

So we came then to Metz. We went to Nancy and to another French city what we had to go through. And then we came to Vittel in France. We didn't know what it is there. But I saw that there were no guards anymore on the train.

What part of France was this?

This was in the Eastern part in the [NON-ENGLISH].

About what month?

Near Colmar.

What month?

It was in-- when was this? The was already in-- we were four weeks on the go, must have been March already something, end of March. Because we were four weeks from one prison, 10 prison go through. It takes four weeks. So then I said, now since we are here, there were no soldiers anymore, no bayonets anymore out on the railroad.

So I was a little already forward already. And this lady, this Mrs. Sana, she spoke very good French. So I said to these guys, I said, if you don't understand the people, this lady speaks French. Maybe she can translate this all. We know where to go. So where can we go? So around the corner, there was really already this camp. It was an interned camp. There were Americans there. There were English people there. And we came in there.

Were those people civilians, or were they military?

These were all-- and the thing this was for the camp, these were German military. But the people were there, they were all persons, they were all interned. They were all from France and from everywhere. Nuns were there, and all. So they were all there for this purpose.

Not prisoners of war?

No, no, no, no. No, just interned. So I didn't know what it goes on. Now finally, we came again to the headquarter. And we got rooms. And we even got a key to the room. Oh, my gosh. A key. So I wrote to Theresienstadt a card, well, here we have water. We have water. We can wash ourselves in the room. And we have a key to the room because who had the key in the room? We were like enemies already. I never got an answer, of course.

But a lady told me they got this letter when I came back. I met the lady from Theresienstadt from my room. And so she told us.

Hilda, how do you account for this atmosphere of putting internees in with--

Because this was again the reason, that we were for the purpose to exchange. There were Americans there. They were under the Red Cross. The Russians were not under the Red Cross. But there were Americans and English. They wouldn't tolerate such a thing. They were in beautiful hotels brought under there. And it was really like you come in another world.

I believe. Was it a hotel were put up in?

They were all real hotels. Because this was once a health resort for kidney disease.

And what was the name of the resort or the town?

Vittel. Vittel.

Spell that.

V-I-T-T-E-L.

In Eastern France?

In Eastern France. Yeah. The [NON-ENGLISH], The district [NON-ENGLISH]. They were later on the big fights by Colmar. And the Americans had their very big fights. And we were also liberated there. The war was for us we had to go, we were again evacuated from there. But anyhow, before this was--

Now, after you left Theresienstadt, were you ever in a work camp, a labor camp?

No, we couldn't. No.

Not at all personally?

No, no. Then it was just on transit all the time.

And this is because you were still under Swedish protection?

Somehow I must have thought about this.

Amazing.

I was lucky. I was really lucky. I didn't know where I would come. So in Theresienstadt, when I went in the morning away, a friend of my husband was there a pupil, a Mr. Firth. And he said, Oh, Mrs. Prooth, what are you doing here? Where do you go?

I said I go on a journey now.

On a journey, he said, what's the matter with you? He thought there, I'm crazy, you know? I said, yes. He said, where do you go? I said I go into Switzerland now. I go in this order. I'm already a little thing. Who goes on Switzerland? Who goes on a journey alone or something? Nobody heard of such a thing.

And when he came back-- he came, also survived in Prague. And when he met my husband on the Jewish congregation, he said you know. I met your wife but she didn't make it. He said, oh yes. She comes back.

Incidentally, did you have any word from your husband or about your husband in all the years you were away?

No. Once I got a card, when I went in hotel already, there were other women. They got cards. Of course, they were printed whatever, is [NON-ENGLISH] or something. And I didn't get anything. So I said, what's the matter with me? Why shouldn't I get it? So I went to the Gestapo in France. I was never afraid. I walked. I had to go. I had to know. So I said, you know, I would like to have an audience with you because my husband is there and there.

And I would like to know whether he is alive or dead. And I would like to know how he is. No, he said to me. This guy said, I don't know anything either. I have no letters from my family. I said for you is something different. For me is something different. I would like to know. So but then he promised me I will get a card. When something comes, he will let me know. And I got a card then, a printed card.

Hilda, tell us about the living conditions in this internment camp. What about food?

No, we got-- we got food from the Red Cross, from the Germans they had to provide.

What type of food?

But we were in France. We were in France. No the food was coffee in the morning and a piece of bread. We had more bread, I must say, as the French people outside.

As much?

Yeah. And better bread because the people from outside, they were the barbed wires went high up. And they said, they came and begged for bread. And when we could, we threw it over this barbed wire, and an old lady gave me then some-- came once and she thanked me so much that I gave her bread. She was visiting her children. They didn't have anything. So right, it was not bad. The food was could live.

And besides bread, what did you eat?

We had potatoes, and sometimes something of meat. I don't remember anymore what we had. But it was not bad. As I say, we could survive on this. What was your daily routine?

I was working again, I had my workshop. I was sewing already.

Uniforms?

No, there were no uniforms. I worked for the Red Cross. I mended for the men who worked for the camp. I mended. And in the afternoon I had a ladies salon already made up. People needed dresses.

How did you get your material?

They had all kind of combination, one dress is bad, the other you cut out, and make another one, and make two-- Out of two, you make one out of this.

But nothing like the other camps where people were shipped off and you got--

No, no. There was, because you see there was also from Poland people who was in Uruguay, not from Uruguay-- yeah from a Southern American thing. And they were very anti-Semitic of course, the government.

And they had the Poland, they could buy papers. They could buy papers from the people which are there. They sent papers from--

Passports?

Uruguay passport. And then another government comes there, and they are anti-Semitic. They say this has no values anymore. So there were a whole part of really from Poland and Russian people. They had to go in a transport. This was pathetic. It was really pathetic. They had to go away in a locked up wagon, kids and all kind. And one young man, I was so shocked. He had here-- it was before Pesach. He had here the matzah in the hand. And he here a [NON-ENGLISH] in the hand.

And so he went in this transport, nothing else. Nothing else. I came. I said, oh my gosh. I said what I saw now, this young man matzah and the [NON-ENGLISH] in this. So impractical, maybe he could do something somewhere. No he had nothing. They were very religious. They had the locks and all that.

So of course, they came in the gas chamber there. A young man just jumped out of the train and then he came through our camp to our hotel. And there were this barbed wire. And of course he jumped. Just I'm telling you they were shooting. He jumped over this wire was maybe so high. He jumped over there and ran away. I think he came away. And the Nazis looked for him, of course. But I hope-- I don't think that they caught him. But this was pathetic.

And afterwards, they said now we have to-- we come away there. There are other people, they always only see black for everything. And I were more or less an optimist. And they came. And they said no, Frau Prooth, now, you have to prepare. We have to go on a transport. They said we coming. I said, I don't prepare anything anymore. Because when we go from here away, there is no going back and nothing to prepare anymore. So I won't prepare anything. And just I will go over there with this. That's all. So thanks God it didn't come to it.

The war became nearer, like Eisenhower. And they all came nearer, the war. And then the Germans, when our thing came, all of them came the Maquis. You know the Maquis, what was it? The French underground came and helped. Of course, we gave them-- they got. Oh yeah, now I know what we ate, we got also. The Red Cross sent parcels every week to the American, to the English. They got parcels from the Red Cross. And because we were nothing, so they made us, they collected for us always, and we got also a parcel.

So there were sometimes [NON-ENGLISH] or whatever sort of food, or corned beef or something, and some dried milk and jam was in there, and coffee, Sanka. No not Sanka, this Nescaf © was in there.

Nescaf ©?

Yeah. And all sorts of things we go. Cigarettes were in there. So right, I didn't under the Nazis, you couldn't smoke cigarettes, because when they smelled from you, you were gone also already. So there I started again to smoke. Because what else did you do? So this is what we get. This is I forgot, these parcels.

So then I saw the people. And the people gave me something to exchange something, some brought a tin of jam. And some brought me another tin of coffee, and so on. So I survived somehow.

Tell us about the arrival of the liberators. Were the Americans or British?

The first came the French army, the French from La Guerre who were fighting in Spain. They came first, and liberated us really. And then came the American Red Cross. Wait. Do you mean, the French partisans?

No. They were not partisans. This was the army.

Yeah?

This is the-- Leclerc. Leclerc with the French?

Yeah.

You know Leclerc?

Yeah.

This is a general who were fighting in Spain the communists against Franco. So they were in somewhere in Libya or somewhere. And when they were nearer to us, so they came first to us here, and liberated us.

How far was your camp from Paris?

Oh, from Paris, it wasn't-- this one was not very far. But when we were later on we were evacuated--

How far?

Well, maybe six, seven hours, I suppose.

To the East of Paris?

Yeah.

And when were you liberated?

We were liberated when the war was over, we were here liberated because we had to go away. The war was on. There were the battles were there, very heavy battles in Colmar, this where the pocket there. And there was heavy, heavy fighting was there. So they had to take us away.

So we went three days. Also again you had to take water, all along. And three days, there and backwards in France. They didn't know where to put us. So we came then to La Bourboule. It was the most gorgeous place where we ever saw.

Wait. Give us a date for this approximately.

It was in October somewhere.

In '44.

It was in October '44. Yeah, it must be the 18th or something October. It was in October, because there was snow already on the ground. And this was a 1,000 meter high.

So the Germans took you out of this internment camp.

Yes. And sent you by train.

Sent us away.

By train or walking?

Yeah, by train. By train.

And where did you arrive?

In La Bourboule.

Which is where?

This is mostly I think it's in the French Alps.

OK.

It's the most gorgeous place what I ever saw.

The whole interned-- all the internees?

All the thing, we came out there.

How many?

Well, maybe how many were roughly? 300, 400 people. And we were evacuated again. We came in several hotels brought under. Of course, this was only a summer resort, this La Bourboule. This was for asthmatic children. But of course, there were no children.

Was this near Chamonix?

No, no, no.

You said in the French Alps.

In the French Alps.

Yeah. This was near-- it was between Vichy and Clermont-Ferrand, so in between there.

Fine. Then how long were you there?

I was there, till I went home in '45, then in May, when then the war was over.

That's when the French troops came.

No then there was the French troops came in with there.

Yes.

There were no troops anymore.

Excuse me. It was the French who sent you or the Germans who sent you? The Germans sent us away.

To the French Alps.

Yeah, no somewhere. They didn't know where to give us. But they sent us on a train and sent us to go.

And then all right.

But the French were the first. The French were there, and liberated us from the war, not the war when it had finished, but the war, the fighting there. And then came the American Red Cross. The first one with the helmet, with the Red Cross on. And they came then there. So they didn't do much, but they opened and they cut the holes in the barbed wires. And I crawled out already. And because I was always very, I'm a Leo. And the Leo has to go everywhere where it's possible. I found a new synagogue, a very wonderful synagogue.

I said to the girls--

Wait, wait, wait. Wait, slow down. Where was this?

In Vittel. In Vittel.

OK.

And this was just before the high holidays. So I said, we could have a service here. Look at this, a synagogue is here. So right then, we had really the service in there, because the armies came there from the American army. And we went out in the freedom, as we said, in French in the city already. And we bought a duck, a goose. And there were a shochet there. They made us this kosher. And we had already a feast here, the first time. You see?

So you survive somehow. You have to survive. However it is. I said I was-- when people commit suicide and all, why do they do this? Maybe they survive somehow. Maybe it is another way. This would be the last resort what you do. But for many people it is the last resort when they commit suicide.

All right, Hilda, you came into the French Alps in the late fall of 1944.

Yeah.

When was your imprisonment over altogether?

More or less this was in prison. We were then again displaced person. See, you came from one stage to another one. Then we were a displaced person there, because we had no country. Some people were already registered to go to Palestine then.

They said to me, come on. Go with us. I said, I cannot. I have to go home and look for my husband. That's all what I had.



Wait. We left. You got there in October of '44.

Yeah.

Bring us up between October of '44 and May of 1945 when Germany surrendered. Tell us what happened to you.

No, they were not much to say. Because I found again an sewing machine somewhere. And I was sewing again for people. And I got a little money. And I had to earn 500 francs, so I can buy on the black market some butter. And bread we got every day, a third of this long bread what the French has. So we got one such a served for one day. It was enough. And so the other thing. You got food in the hotel.

But sometimes it was not to eat, so it goes in the toilet in. Because then you looked already something else to get somewhere. See? So everybody tried somehow to get something somewhere.

How did you-- what gave you strength and hope in all this period?

I have to find my husband.

Did you?

Yeah.

Tell us. I didn't find him, but I found my brother through the Red Cross. I found the address for my brother in England. He lived in Birmingham and got married to a Gentile girl. And so I had already with him the connection. When the war was in Germany, this came when my husband was-- they just fled other way. They brought him on-- how you call it? On a [NON-ENGLISH], death march.

If you die, you die. If you fall down, if you can make it, you are shot down. So and they went and went everywhere. They finally came in a place, [NON-ENGLISH] or something my husband told me. And there they were staying, and then they were for them the war over. This were already then Americans there.

So then they took a car somewhere, they were five guys from Prague. And they went home. They tried to come home to Prague. But they couldn't go only to Pilsen. The English couldn't go further. And the Americans couldn't go further, until the Pilsen on the border from Czechoslovakia, because they made a pact, our government with Russian and all. They made this pact. They cannot go further. They [? stopped ?] for the Russian.

So right, so my husband went in Pilsen to the English headquarters, because he knew Carl was in England. He didn't know where or what?

Your brother, Carl?

Yeah. So he said he went there, and this guy said, of course, my husband was 6 foot tall. He was a professor once who spoke this English, King's English. So he went. He said, what can I do for you, sir? He said I would like to look for people, for young soldiers, maybe from Carlsbad. My wife is born in Carlsbad, is born this and this. And her brother was I know, he was once in the army, in the Czech army. So I assume he is again in the army somewhere.

So this is [NON-ENGLISH], or whoever it was. He called all the guys from this city together, and they were frightened. They wondered what they did. They had to summon them in the-- so they came in. And he said, the issue stating. So he said, this chap here, he said his wife comes from Carlsbad. And I wonder what you are from there, whether you know these people, him.

Oh, yes, we went with her to school, one said. And the other said, my mother lived with him in the same building in Birmingham. So right this was already wonderful. So he wrote me. He couldn't write anything. But the soldier wrote a letter to his mother. And my brother didn't even know I was married. But I wrote him already. I had the connection

already. So then my husband wrote a few letters, a few lines to it. And then he got this letter. So my husband knew already that he is alive. And he sent me a telegram. He said, Mike is alive.

So this is how everything comes somehow together.

How did you get to Prague?

Oh, this was a terrible thing. I went in. When the war was over, it took maybe a long time, maybe in July or something or beginning of August. A friend of mine, she worked for the French government for the refugees that we were. And she was from Berlin. She was very-- I was my customer. I was sewing for them. They had money. So they said, she went to Paris. She had to go to Paris. I said, oh go to the Czech consul, or whoever there is, and tell them I want to go home. I have to go home.

So she was there two days and she sent me a telegram already. Hilda come back up and come to Paris. So I packed up and went to Paris. And so she picked me up from the train and brought me in a beautiful villa. Well, these were all refugees there. They were from Liechtenstein there, and they were from Belgium there, people and me, Czechs too. And so now, I went to the-- and I should have gone immediately to Orleans, and should have flown home.

So when I came to early on the airport, they found out I went in a German school. So I explained it to them. When I was born, and when I was a kid and went to school, there were no Czech, there were no Czechoslovakia. They were still Austrian Hungarian. And they had no Czech school. Right? What you're doing to me? So right, they didn't take me. I had to go back again to Paris and again in this camp.

So I was running really like a boomerang there and back. And four weeks I was running around. Finally in this camp, in this Czech camp there, this was divided. These were rooms for Czech. And these were rooms for Lichtenstein. And these were rooms for this and this all. And there was a girl, a German girl, and she was running around with this one guy who was a little manager in this camp. And I told him, this is so terrible what they do to me. I cannot go home. Yet then they said I have to get from the Czech government papers that they allow me to come back, since I was at a German school, and all kinds of the thing. I said, but I'm Czech.

So therefore, I have this paper. I'm allowed to come back to Prague again. So then they said. This guy said to me, you are such a run around, and they don't let you go easy, up to the consul, you better write a letter and go in the afternoon to the consulate, when nobody is there. And give it to the concierge. This is a custodian. Give it to the concierge and tell them wait for an answer.

So she went up there. And he let me come in, this consulate. And what had happened, we had the address in Prague, where we will find each other when we should survive. This way, we had to act, what a friend from the consulate, and then in the end he said, I know your husband. Isn't he an English professor? I said, yes, he's my husband.

All right. He said, I know and you had the best right to go home again. And he told me then and then goes a transport. It goes to Epernay we have to go. All right. I went to Epernay. It was a terrible camp. And so then we went to-- two weeks. I was in this camp. I was so cold. I was never frozen so much. But there were three soldiers, Czech soldiers. And they picked me up, really picked me up in Paris on the train. And I had already conserved you know tins, and all prepared, when my husband and I come home. He would be hungry. He would be starving. And so I had a rucksack full of these tins.

And I had all this luggage there. And I had to schlep it all the time. Now what can I do? So the three soldiers said to me in Czech, can we join you? I said, yeah. If you carry my things here, you can join me. So what a guy. Oh, he was tall. So he took this in hand, he said for goodness sake. What you have in here. I said, these are all tins for my husband when I come home, because he would be starving. And I should bring him something to eat.

So right, they were very nice and they took care of me the two weeks when we were in Epernay. Epernay is the out thing, there were the grapes for the champagne. And oh, it was a gorgeous city too. So we went away, took some potatoes from a field, and baked them outside. And we had to survive. And then we went on this transport. They brought

all these orders were a terrible transport. They brought from Northern France all the communistic miners to Czechoslovakia and back again, repatriating again them.

Because they threw out all the Nazis what were in this coal mines. You know, Sudeten district had big coal mines there. They had nobody there. So they had to bring them from there again back. And these were the most lowest, lowest people were ever there. And then came women from the Red Cross. And they said, I couldn't be with 18 men here. I said, yes, I will stay with these 18 men here. I don't go in another wagon. Because this is were these cattle trucks.

You open here, there, and you just go out. But I stayed there.

What year was this?

'45.

Still?

So in August '45. I just had my birthday in this Epernay. So we went out and had a good dinner with potatoes, took out had baked potatoes and all kind. And so we had a thing. You lived. How could you do? Whatever it was possible. So then we went two weeks in these cattle trucks through Germany and come home to Prague. So this was this.

How did you recuperate physically? How long did it take?

Bad. Bad. A year I couldn't go near a train. I couldn't go. My husband said, maybe we go there. I said, don't ask me anything. I cannot go near a train. I don't want to see a train, nothing. I couldn't see a train. A whole year, I couldn't see a train. Otherwise, if I didn't see a train it was all right with me.

When you went home, naturally, you met your husband.

No, not immediately. My husband was already teaching in a school in a university. And this my friends, they were engineers. So he said always when some mail or something comes, that they will come. So when I came this at night at 4 o'clock. I had no money. I had only cigarettes. And this was a fairly way where I had to go with his friends. And I heard in the street that everything were locked up. Even the railroads were locked up. And the people said you cannot get out here, because the Russians were raping the women, and you cannot get out. I said, I have to go out. I open the door, a big door and I heard this click clack with a horse.

So you were in Prague? By the Wenceslas Platz? Yeah? Where the museum is? From there came, and there is a railroad next door. And then from there, I heard a click clack, click clack, some horses. So I looked out. And I said to this guy. You know what? I have no money. I have cigarettes. I can give you cigarettes. Bring me down there and there. This was near [NON-ENGLISH], further out. So he said, yeah, I'll take you. It was 3 o'clock in the morning.

So I went in the cart. The luggage I gave into in the storage there. And I went with this one satchel, all rags. So I went there and this guy wanted to go another way. I said, where do you driving around here? This is not the way I should go. No right then you have to give me more cigarettes. So I said, no. I give you one. If you don't let me go there, I get out and walk. That's what you do. Right?

Finally, he brought me there to the door. So then I went up in this house. And of course, I had to ring the custodian out. And this custodian was a new one in this all the time. And so they let me in. And I said, I'm a friend from [NON-ENGLISH], so I knocked at the door 4 o'clock in the morning. And I thought my husband would be there somewhere. No, he had an apartment already somewhere else in the city. So I came in. Oh, my gosh. At least they gave me a hot bath, and they had to clean. I was dirty you couldn't believe it. Two weeks on a cattle truck. And so nice, in a nice couch, they made up and all.

And in the morning, when Mike called up, and said, is there news? He said, yeah. Come on here and pick up the news yourself. So he came at 10:00, when he had recess. He came. And I opened the door and big as was, he fainted in my

arms. And I said-- and I learned a very good English, because I knew when we are in Prague, we cannot speak German. He couldn't speak very good Czech, of course. So I thought I have to learn English, because we had to talk now English. German, I cannot talk in Prague now after this thing, what they had there.

So I said immediately, so right finally we went home. And he had the apartment already, two bedrooms and a kitchen, and bathroom and all, in the city. And me and my neighborhood where I lived. And so it was all right. But he said, you know what? I don't work anymore. Because you cannot buy anything. Here you have the ration cards, and you cannot get for the ration cards.

I said you better go to work. We will have to need the money, you know? I said to him. And I went to the old custodian where I lived used to live, and they gave me already a casserole with a roast. And I came home I said, you see. We won't starve. Now we have it already. I'm home, and you won't starve, and you go to work, and you make the money. And because I will need the money, we have to buy on the black market. So that's what it is.

Then what were your plans for the future?

I didn't have plans at all. They told him, my Mike, he could go back to Germany. And he could get our furniture along, and we could get an apartment. I said I don't go to Germany and I don't want to see anything. And I don't go any railroad. And I don't go anywhere. I stay here now. But of course, he didn't feel too good. His nerves, he lost 100 pounds. He was sick, of course. So after a while, I saw what I do to him if I wouldn't go anywhere. The people got lost in the street. When you say something, for instance, I took a newspaper. We had four newspapers then. And I bought this one newspaper. Went in a dry cleaner store.

And this guy said to me, oh you buy this newspaper too? I said, yeah. That's right. And he had a girl working there. Next day, I came and wanted to pick up my things. I said, where is Mr so-and-so. Oh, he's not here anymore. He was gone already. They arrested him already, because he was sympathizing with this newspaper. What party was the paper? What politics?

I don't remember what for. There were democratic. Democratic, they had then four papers. Of course, there were the Russian newspaper. And they were a state newspaper. And they were this democrat newspaper. These were all later-- they're now gone.

And this was the Russians who arrested?

The Russians, sure. The Russians. And so my Mike was so afraid. He got so sick then his nerves were. So I thought, all right. I said, all right. If you have somebody to write it's finished now?

No. Go ahead. Go ahead.

And if you have somewhere to go to America, let's go to America. All right. He wrote to a friend, but before his pupil was. But he sent in every day, but this was not a whole every day. It was not a very good one. And I must say that the consul in Prague, they were the most horrible people that I ever saw.

The American consul?

The American consul. They were not very good. Nobody liked these people. We came in this office. He sits there with the feet on the thing. He wouldn't say can I help you or something, until I said, you know, and my husband was so his nerves were so shocked, and he was so down, because not a bit of respect nothing to show. He couldn't speak the language at all. Who sent out in another language, therefore, we are so bad off.

And so he wasn't very helpful. So a friend of ours. she could get someone go there, and she went to her relatives, and her dead husband's relatives to Saint Louis. And so she said, she prepared everything for us. You go illegally across the border. So we went illegally across the border to Germany.

We're going to let you stop there for a few minutes. And then we'll come back with another segment, Hilda.

Yeah. Oh, my God.

Thank you.