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Abstract

Doris Rauch was born August 16, 1920, an only child in Brno, Czechoslovakia. Of Brno's 350,000 population, its Jewish population was approximately 12,000, and only 1,000 survived the war. Her father had a textile business that failed during the Depression. He died in 1936. Doris' mother had a small inheritance and earned money renting out rooms. Doris graduated from high school in 1938 but Jews were banned from university. So she graduated from a textile school in 1939.

Doris and her mother were sent to Theresienstadt in December 1941. They were separated in Estonia, and Doris never saw her again. Doris spent the next two years in in Rassiku and Reval in Estonia. At the end of 1943, Doris was sent to a camp in Ereda, Estonia, where she became very ill. The Ereda camp commander, Drosin, and Inya Silken, a Jewish woman Doris knew from Brno, fell in love and fled into the woods. When they were found, Drosin shot and killed Inya and himself.

Following Ereda, she was sent to Bergin-Belsen. Isaac, a young man who later died in Bergen-Belsen, made a silver ring for Doris and carved their names in it. She is willing it to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. At the end of 1944, she was sent to Lagedi, Germany, then to Stutthof (now Sztutowo, Poland), to the first real concentration camp she experienced. She was so ill, "It was a miracle that I survived."

In April 1945, she and others were sent to Lüneburg (Lueneburg), Germany in cattle cars filled with corpses. Corpses also lay in ditches. A band played near a hall piled up with corpses. From Lüneburg (Lueneburg), she was marched to Bergen-Belsen, and later in April, to Hamburg.

After the war, she was sent to Denmark, where she was greeted by the Danish Red Cross, and then Sweden, where she lived for two years and worked for the World Jewish Congress.

Doris' uncle in America sponsored her, and she arrived in New York on May 19, 1947. Two years later, she married a Viennese man, and they moved to Chicago, then to Pittsburgh, and later settled in Washington, DC. She receives two pensions from Germany.

Doris says, "I feel very strongly about being Jewish, but lost all feelings about religion…a God would not have permitted such horrors to happen."

Tape I, Side A

Doris Rauch was born August 26, 1920, an only child, in Brno, Czechoslovakia. Of Brno's 350,000 population, approximately 12,000 were Jews, and only 1,000 survived. Her parents were born in Austria-Hungary. Like most Brno residents, her parents were bilingual in Czech and German. They spoke only German in their home. Doris went to German schools.

1:31 They lived in an apartment in a middle-class, centrally located, mixed neighborhood where Jews and non-Jews lived alongside each other.

2:08 Her father had inherited his father's wholesale leather business. Doris' father traveled all over Czechoslovakia to sell leather to manufacturers. Her mother did not work until the depression hit the husband's business in the 1930's. She filled in as secretary.

The family was not very religious, but observed Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Pesach. After Yom Kippur, the entire family broke the fast at Doris' grandmother's house. On Pesach, the entire family had a Seder in her father's oldest brother's house. She had one hour of religious training in grade school and again in high school (gymnasium). She did not learn much religion, and says she was not a very good student.

She had some problems in her neighborhood but did not know much about anti-Semitism. She says she did not personally experience anti-Semitism. Some students in her public school were Germans. Later, she did not enjoy her non-Jewish classmates. She broke her relationships with them.

6:02 She hiked and skied. She played mostly with her cousins, who all lived within walking distance. No modern languages were taught in school, so she had foreign language education outside of school. She took private French and English lessons and spoke Czech very well. She was sent to Czech-speaking cities to perfect her knowledge of Czech, and to Switzerland to perfect her French. She had no interest in music because she did not have an ear for music. She took piano lessons but was absolutely unmusical. One of happiest moments in her life was when her piano teacher said it did not make sense for her to continue. She took dancing and gymnastics lessons.

13:36 In the early 1930s, her father lost his business, so he went into business with family members. In 1936, when Doris was 16 years old, her father died of lung cancer. It was very hard for her because she was very close to her father. She was not as close to her mother. Her mother was very capable and intelligent.

14:30 Her mother earned a living by renting out rooms in their apartment; by selling woolen materials to friends; and by getting commissions for referring people to

certain coffee houses. She had inherited some money but always made an effort to earn money. Her father had not left anything. They got information about Germany and Hitler from friends and family. Her mother was very confident that all would be well.

17:50 In 1938, Hitler occupied the Sudenten. They had to wear the yellow star. Doris was not frightened because she felt protected. She and her mother could not emigrate. "I was very naïve." Also in 1938, she graduated from gymnasium, but could not continue her education because Jews were not permitted to enter German or Czech higher education institutes. She went to a Czech post-graduate textile school, and graduated in June 1939. Brno was a textile factory center, but the textile field did not interest her. "It seemed like a good time" although Hitler occupied Czechoslovakia by the time she graduated.

20:40 First they had to wear a yellow star, which was demeaning to her as well as to others. Then they were restricted to living only on certain streets. Her street was one of those streets. Two families crowded in with Doris and her mother in their three-room, one-bathroom apartment. Her favorite aunt moved into their neighborhood.

22:17 Doris got an unpaid job in a textile factory in the country, where she lived five days a week. The factory was hours away from her house. Her school friends never got in touch with her. They were not allowed to have telephones, and could make phone calls in stores only between three and four in the afternoon. However, when she went home on weekends, she spent time with her Jewish friends.

26:53 Many of her co-workers were peasants. They were very nice and never exhibited anti-Semitism. They even came to her apartment during weekends and brought food for the family. They had ration cards and had to stand on line in grocery stores. They rented a radio to get news about world affairs. She did not maintain her gentile friendships. Her young uncle and she were the only two family members to survive.

28:36 Doris remembers listening to the radio and hearing "Peace in Our Time." She recalls learning about Hitler's invasion of Poland in September 1939, and then began to fear what could happen to her. "It all came very fast." She continued to work at the textile factory, and also took care of four children.

Tape I, Side B

32:06 In late 1940, food became scarce, and shopping hours were shorter. Park benches had signs on them "No Jews allowed." Jews were not allowed to go to coffee shops, restaurants, or movies. They spent time reading, socializing and dancing. Deportation from Brno started in November 1941. Some Jews they knew were

sent to Poland. Others were deported to Theresienstadt. Her mother's oldest brother, his wife, and children were sent away.

36:34 All Jews had to register. Papers were placed under doors telling everyone to report to the school on Merhout Street on a certain date. They were allowed to take about 50 pounds including a feather blanket. They could take blankets, a feather bed, and a pail. When they were to be sent to Teresin in December 1941, people came to help them pack. The mother hid a small pail of jam in the larger pail. Everyone had to walk to the school at night so residents would not see them. About 1,000 people slept on the floor for three days and nights. Early on the third morning, they walked to one of the first train transports to Teresin.

43:26 When they arrived at Theresienstadt, Doris and her mother were put in the Dresdner barrack that could hold 3,000 women. At first, they had nothing to do. Later, Doris worked in the barrack's one-room post office, and her mother worked in the Jewish commander's office. Doris met many people when she was distributing mail. Husbands and wives, having been separated, could write to each other, and also send food to each other. There was not much food. Their basic meal was turnip soup and a piece of bread. Doris was still optimistic.

50:08 In May 1942, Doris and her mother volunteered to plant trees in Bohemia for six weeks. They arranged with friends who had not yet been deported from Brno to send food to an inn in Bohemia. Doris saved the food for when they returned to Theresienstadt.

53:04 When they returned to Theresienstadt, they encountered her Uncle Norbet. The food they brought back with them helped bring him regain his health. In June 1942, more people were being sent to the camp, and it was becoming very crowded. It was very hard for older people. She was with her favorite aunt, Annie Weiner, who was a nurse.

Doris remembers transports leaving for the East all the time, but no one knew what was waiting for them. To have connections was very important. For example, a guard who was her boyfriend saved them from one transport, and an uncle in the technical department saved them from another transport. But the third time, nothing worked.

1:00:33 The man she worked for promised to help her when she was going to be shipped out. He knew the man in charge. In September 1942, they were shipped out. They traveled for three days. They met some people they knew, including a man she thought she fell in love with.

She recalls that at Theresienstadt, the highlight was Czech dumplings that were cooked at dinner about once a week. She and her mother ate while sitting on their mattress on the floor in their room – they had their own room. Breakfast was coffee-like water, with bread. Lunch and dinner both were turnip soup and bread.

Tape II, Side A

They were loaded onto a regular train. They stopped in Riga, Latvia. They were given food brought from Theresienstadt. They also got water from time to time. In Riga, she saw a woman from her hometown. The blond, blue-eyed Jewish woman, named Inya Silken, wore a Red Cross uniform.

From Riga, Doris traveled five days to Estonia. They were given postcards and were told to write home and say that everything was fine, and they were going to be working in some agricultural place called Rassiku, Estonia. “Can you imagine? We were also told that we would meet everyone later.” She doesn’t know whether these cards were ever sent out.

45 Estonian and German SS men separated people and put them into light blue buses. Her mother was sent in one bus. Doris stayed to help unload luggage, and then joined a group that traveled to a camp consisting of five wooden barracks and towers with guards in them. It was in a wooded area.

The group of men, women and children “had to undress, do gymnastics to prove that we were not hiding anything, and then we were sent back to barracks.” In the barracks, they were told that their families had gone to a warmer place. Doris was in the camp for two years. She always thought she would be reunited with her family. They never heard anything about gassing or shooting. They cooked food that they found.

140 The 50 women worked only some of the time, sorting clothes and jewelry left behind, and gave everything to the Germans. The barracks became like a house. Friendships developed, and everyone shared everything. Then, Doris and 25 to 30 others were sent to harvest potatoes and carrots for six weeks. The work was very hard, and they had very little food. When they returned to the camp, they were placed in another barrack, and she was put in charge. She was supposed to make people clean toilets. But they refused, so she did it. One day, she met a group of men, and saw her boyfriend.

230 In December 1942, Doris and the other women traveled an hour from Raasiku by truck to Reval (now Tallinn, Estonia) to clear rubble and unload bricks in a harbor area destroyed by Russians. The work, for the German construction firm Holzmann, was very hard. They got some extra food. One day it was so cold they did not have to go to work. Ten women lived in a cell, and took turns sleeping on seven beds. One person slept on a cabinet, two on the floor. Women guards threw raw fish heads into cells for breakfast. This place was one hour away from Raasiku.

280 The Holzmann firm was rebuilding the harbor. The men were nice to them.

355 Some of the women did not have shoes. They stayed there about a year. Her health was still good. They worked six days straight, and on Sundays they were free to take care of their needs. She still thought her family members were alive. She found a friend's child in Estonia.

When they went to Reval (Tallinn), they had to put out all their belongings for Nazis to go through.

She found out about Camp Kloga, and was told that everyone had died.

Tape II, Side B

They had a down comforter. She sewed dresses and other things in the middle of it, hoping to save it for others, but it was found and taken away from them. They were sent on different assignments that used to be fun.

405 "At end of 1943, about 80 of us were sent to another camp in Ereda. Most of the other inmates were Jews from Lithuania and Poland -- most from Vilna. This was the first time we had ever heard Yiddish, but our German helped us understand." Yiddish was not spoken in Czechoslovakia, or they just never heard it.

438 Men and women had separate barracks. The camp was terrible, very muddy, long walk to latrines, which were dirty. They urinated in pails in front of each barrack at night. They had brushes and used them for cleaning all the time, but it was impossible to get the barracks clean. Fleas and lice were everywhere. People got typhus from lice. They were still wearing their own clothes. They did not wear yellow stars. Doris and many other women had no menstrual periods.

464 Everyone worked very hard, cutting trees and carrying them on their shoulders. They built another camp in the woods. Eventually, Doris just could not do it. She does not think that she was mistreated. She asked to be transferred to some other work.

480 She stayed in Ereda from end of 1943 to late 1944. She had practically nothing to wear. In the winter of 1944, she gave away her little jacket.

The doctors were Jews. Their guards were German SS. Doris tells about commander of camp, Drosin, who fell in love with Inya Silken and she fell in love with him. "Inya always spoke up for us." Drosin and Inya knew they were being observed. They escaped and hid in the woods but were caught. Drosin shot Inya, and then shot himself.

Doris stayed in Ereda until the end of 1944. She had a young man friend, Isaac, who made a silver ring for her. She doesn't know where the silver came from. He engraved her name on one side, and his on the other. She says that in her will, she will leave the ring to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

She was told later that Isaac died in Bergen-Belsen. In late 1944, Russians were coming closer. Prisoners could hear the shooting. They were evacuated by train to Lagedi, Germany, where they lived for six weeks, and slept outside. Her hair was shaved off there for the first time. All women's heads were shaved there.

She had become very sick in Ereda. "I had high fever." The Jewish doctor thought she had hepatitis. She couldn't work and just lay down in a meadow. She barely stayed alive.

Six weeks after they arrived in Lagedi, a group of men and women were transferred by freighter and then in a canal boat to Stutthof in Eastern Germany (now Sztutowo, Poland). They were so crowded that no one could sit or lie down. Doris remained very sick. When she showered, she hid her watch in soap, and then in her mouth. She still has the watch, and plans to will it to the Holocaust Museum.

She wrote in a diary every day while she was in Estonia. She gave the diary to a man who promised to save it. But she never saw him or the diary again. In Stutthof (Sztutowo), no one did anything. She met people she had known in Estonia. They were barely fed, and didn't even have a spoon to eat with. "This was first real concentration camp I had been in. It was awful." She stayed there from August 26, 1944 until October 1944, when they were sent to Hamburg. She was very sick with pneumonia or typhoid fever, and also terrible diarrhea. She stayed in a barrack with six or seven other sick people. "It was a miracle that I survived."

Her best friend was the secretary to a German officer. She arranged for Doris to work in a factory as a seamstress.

In April 1945, they were sent to Lüneburg (Lueneburg) in cattle cars. "It was terrible." Train cars were filled with dead people, and dead people were also lying in ditches. At one place, a band was playing across from a hall where dead bodies were piled up. From Lüneburg (Lueneburg), they were marched to Bergen-Belsen.

Tape III, Side A

Later in April 1945, she was marched from Bergen-Belsen to Zele beim Hanover and then to Hamburg. There were many people, and they all had to register. Flyers, dropped from planes, said that the British were close. The rails were bombed. After the war, she read that people in Zele beim Hanover, near Bergen-Belsen, didn't know that the camp existed. She and her fellow survivors did not work anymore. She was feeling a lot better. She did not have medicine, but staying in bed helped.

Then, they were taken in cattle cars to Haudsbrong, on the border of Germany and Denmark. At the border, the Danish Red Cross met them. They boarded regular trains taking them to Sweden. Every seat had little packages with sandwiches and chocolate. The Danes were very welcoming. In Copenhagen, "We learned that Hitler was dead" when they saw a newspaper headline. Then they went on a train to a ferry that had beautiful tables, flowers, and food. On May 2, 1945, they arrived at Myver, Denmark. They were met by the Red Cross, which burned their clothes. They showered and got new clothing. They were "fed very little food so we wouldn't get sick. It was hard to believe we were free."

She went to Sweden where she stayed with two best friends for two years. She worked as an English-German secretary for the World Jewish Congress, where her two friends worked. Her uncle sent her papers from America.

70 Doris' uncle in America sponsored her, and she arrived in New York on May 19, 1947. Her uncle had found her a job with an export-import firm, and a furnished room with a family on West 86th Street.

"It was culture shock. It was so different from Sweden." In New York, no one seemed to want to know about her experiences.

After two years, she married a Viennese man who had managed to go to United States before the war. They moved to Chicago, then to Pittsburg, and finally, to Washington, D.C. She is very glad that she ended up in Washington.

She says she has been helped by psychotherapy.

Question: How do you feel about being Jewish?

Answer: I feel very strongly about being Jewish, but lost all feelings about religion. I feel that a God would not have permitted such horrors to happen. I get two pensions from Germany. I feel very good about getting it now. At first I felt awful, about receiving anything from Germany, even mail.

129 I went back to Estonia in 1992. We were well received.

130 While in Sweden, we were sent to recuperate in Vernamure. One day, we went to a reception where I met a minister of a church. He asked where I was during the war. He told me that a minister friend from Estonia told him a story about a transport that arrives one day and some men from his congregation had to shoot them. Some of them apparently became emotionally sick from that act. I felt that this was my story, and that my mother must have been one of those people shot. I finally wrote to that minister. He wrote to me, telling me what he knew and remembered. He was consoling me, saying, maybe my mother and family was not amongst them. In 1960, some of the Estonian SS men were tried. Two of them were hanged. Others were convicted in absentia. One of them, Laak, was

the commander. After the war, he fled to Canada. The Russians were broadcasting the news about the trial, he heard about the trial, and he hanged himself. I was informed about this while I lived in Chicago. There is a monument in the city where this happened. It is written in several languages because not only Czechs but Russians as well as others were killed there. I went there in 1992 to the 50th anniversary celebration. My reflections are that I hate the Germans and would never set foot in Germany. I have conflicting feelings about former classmates.

I read as much as I can about the Holocaust. My friend Eugenia, who lived in Tallinn, had worked on a book about Estonian Jews. My uncle wrote a book about Theresienstadt.