

Interview with Doris Rauch
July 7, 1995

Question: Could you please tell us your full name.

Answer: My name is Doris Rauch.

Q: And where were you born?

A: I was born in Berdenau (ph), Czechoslovakia on August 26, 1920.

Q: Let's begin about talking about the town that you -- the city that you grew up in. Can you describe it in any way?

A: It had about 350,000 inhabitants. I've no idea how many Jews, but I suppose it can be looked up. And it was bilingual, both Czech and German. We spoke German at home because my parents were born in Austria, Hungary, and were brought up speaking German and going to German schools. And the same happened to me.

Q: What kind of neighborhood did you live in? Was it a mixed neighborhood of Jews and non-Jews?

A: Yes. It was a mixed neighborhood. Can one hear your questions?

Q: Yes.

A: There was no ghetto as such at all.

Q: Did you live right in town? In the downtown area? Or centrally located?

A: Yes. Centrally located.

Q: Now did you live in a house or an apartment?

A: In an apartment.

Q: How would you describe your family? Were you middle class?

A: Yes, we were middle class.

Q: Okay, let's now talk about your parents. What kind of work did your father do?

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A: My father had a wholesale leather business which he inherited from his father. He was not really a businessman. But he couldn't help it. He had to become the owner of the wholesale leather business, which meant that he had to travel a lot to various manufacturers all over Czechoslovakia to sell leather from which they made shoes and gloves and things like that.

Q: And your mother, did she work?

A: No, my mother didn't work until when my father's business became very bad, in the Depression. We had the Depression too, in the thirties. She filled in as his secretary or answering the telephone and so on.

Q: How religious was your family?

A: Not very religious. We went to the synagogue on the high holy days, which was New Year's and Yom Kippur. And we all met in my grandmother's house, when Yom Kippur was over, to break the fast with cake and -- all sorts of cakes -- and coffee. And the whole family congregated there.

Q: Any other holidays that you celebrated? or were those the only ones?

A: We also, not in our house, but _____ every August went to my mother's oldest brother and _____ there.

Q: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

A: No.

Q: And did you have any religious training as a child yourself?

A: Yes. We had an hour of so-called religion, both in grade school and then later in the gymnasium, which is a classical high school. But I am afraid we were not very good students. It was just something you had to go through.

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Q: Now you said you lived in a mixed neighborhood of non-Jews and Jews as a child growing up. Were there any problems when you were young with any of your neighbors?

A: No problems at all. We never -- I personally never knew about the Semitism. Maybe it was kept from me, I don't know.

Q: And the school that you went to, was it a public school or --

A: It was public. Both schools were public schools, yes.

Q: So your schoolmates were also non-Jews and Jews.

A: Yes. And in addition, there were Germans and belonged to the so-called Sudatin (ph) German where became the worst Nazis there were. So I have very mixed feelings about my former classmates. Sentimentally, I feel very attached to them, but on the other hand, I attended a couple of meetings with them in Europe. But I broke up with them completely because they behaved as if they didn't know about the Holocaust.

Q: When you were in elementary school, as a child, did you have any other interests outside of school? Any hobbies? Did you do anything else besides go to school?

A: Well, we went on hikes. And skiing.

Q: Did you belong to any youth groups?

A: No, I did not. I had quite a few cousins my own age, so we very often played together and did things together.

Q: Did your relatives live nearby? Your extended family live nearby?

A: Yes. Everything was -- almost all of them were reachable on foot, or at the most by bus or streetcar.

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Q: Then you went on to gymnasium, you said. And did you have any other outside interest at that time? At high school age?

A: Well, I took French lessons and English lessons -- no, English -- yes, the last two years of the -- My high school didn't have any modern languages except Czech. You talked -- I mean the language -- the instruction was in German, but you had Czech as a foreign language. And in addition to that, I was very often sent to Czech-speaking towns in the summer so that my Czech would become perfect.

Q: Was this your family went away? or you went away by yourself?

A: I went away by myself to friends or relatives where the main language was Czech. And we had no other modern languages, only Latin and Greek in school. So I had private lessons, first in French for many years. And I was sent to Switzerland to speak French fluently. And I also had English lessons later on which really stuck with me because the teacher was wonderful. With French, I've totally forgotten, almost. And I even learned Spanish one year, when Hitler was already occupying us. Occupied myself, I guess. Or for possible immigration.

Q: Were you interested in music? Dance? Any of the arts?

A: I took piano for I don't know how many years and was absolutely unmusical. And one of the happiest days of my life was when the teacher said, "No." She doesn't think it had any use for me to learn piano anymore. That is as far as my musicality is concerned. _____. We had, what you call it, gymnastics and dance lessons from a very good teacher whom we adored. And that was something very pleasant in my youth, going twice a week to those lessons.

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Q: So you said that your friends, some of your friends, and your teachers were not Jewish, but you don't recall any anti-Semitic incidents. It was a very pleasant childhood growing up.

A: Yes. Well, pleasant, perhaps. But you know, when my father had all his business difficulties, a child fears that even if they didn't talk in front of me, but I knew there was something going on. And I had to inherit the 10,000 Czech crowns from a great uncle of mine. And so, I knew that my father needed money, so I offered him my 10,000 crowns, which I'm sure would have been a drop in the bucket. So, you know, I remembered this. But he lost his business and my mother's brothers took him into their business, which was a wholesale fur business.

Q: What year was this?

A: That was in the early thirties; I don't know exactly which year. So I was, I don't know, ten years old or twelve years old.

Q: But you still were able to do other activities.

A: Yeah. I didn't curtail my activities at all.

Q: Okay. When did you start noticing, then, a change in your life? When did conditions --

A: You mean as far -- well, when I was, I think, 17 years old because --

Q: This is 1937 we're in now.

A: 1937, yeah. For instance, one of my fellow students told me I had remonstrated _____ with him, that he didn't do so well in school anymore and he was a very intelligent guy. And he told me that he was very tired because every night he went across the borders to Austria to train for Hitler's coming. I didn't even believe it. I

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thought he was just bragging in front of me. But today I know it was true. So -- and do you know then in 1938, Hitler occupied the Sudatin (ph) line? And I felt very strongly that my parents had done the wrong thing, that they sent me to a German school. And I wore a Czech flag on my lapel in that year after Hitler really occupied the entire state and we had to wear a star instead of a flag. But I still feel that today that it was a great mistake that I did not go to a Czech school. So of course, the outcome would have been the same.

Q: But there was a choice when you were younger to go to a Czech school or a German school?

A: Well, the choice was not up to me. I mean, the way we go to our -- yes, I could have gone.

Q: Yes, I mean, your parents had the choice, but they decided to send you to a German school

A: Yes. I went to the same school that my father graduated from.

Q: Alright, so it's now 1938.

A: Yes, but there's a big event before that. My father had lung cancer. And he died in 1936, when I was 16 years old. And that was very hard on me because I was very close to my father, much more so than to my mother.

Q: And how did that change your life and your mother's life?

A: Well, my mother tried to make a living by renting out a room to two girl students. She did all sorts of things. She had a representation -- no, you don't say that. Anyhow, she sewed, knit woolen materials to friends and got a commission on that. And then she sent all her friends to certain coffee shop in the town. And there they had to say

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that they were sent by my mother and she got a percentage from that. So my mother was very capable, although she never really worked. But she was very intelligent and very practical. And although there probably was some money, my father hadn't left anything because we just lived on his salary. But I think my mother inherited money from her mother. And I know she had stocks in the bank because I used to go with her to collect the coupons. But she always made an effort to earn some money herself.

Q: So that was 1936. Anything in 1937 that you recall?

A: Well, I was -- you mean as far as anti-Semitism?

Q: Or personally?

A: Well, I was sent to Switzerland that summer, into a French-speaking family.

Q: What did you know about Hitler at that point?

A: Well, we knew quite a bit. Perhaps not I, but my mother had a very close friend in Germany, in Oldham (ph). And this woman came to us once a year, usually, and my mother went to visit her. And she smuggled out some money from Germany before they immigrated to Argentina. So we knew what was going on there. And then, also, Hitler occupied Austria in 1938 and one of my mother's brothers lived in Vienna. So they all immigrated first to Czechoslovakia to Berdenau (ph) before they attempted to get a visa to someplace else. And they did eventually go to France and from France to unoccupied France. And they got to America maybe 1940, 1939 or '40.

Q: Do you remember being particularly frightened in 1938?

A: Not really. But that was perhaps because I was so naive, you know? I grew up in a very protected way. And I was rather childish at that age. And my mother used to

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say, "Nothing will happen to us. I'm happy here as long as I have a roof over my head." That was her constant saying. I would have liked to immigrate, but it wasn't easy because we didn't have any money out anywhere. And it was very difficult to get a visa to anyplace. But some of my friends succeeded, but we didn't.

Q: Alright. And now it's 1938. Any other changes that you can recall?

A: Yes. Of course, I graduated from gymnasium in 1938. But I could no longer go to a university. That was 193--. You know, I don't remember how that was. Anyhow, I could not study. And my mother said --

Q: Why could you not study?

A: Because they didn't admit Jews.

Q: How did that make you feel? Here you're a young, 18-year-old young woman.

A: I don't remember. Probably not very well. But I was not -- as I said, I was very naive. And all this didn't touch me somehow. And my mother decided I should attend a class in a Czech -- that's what it was. We were not admitted to German-speaking universities. Maybe still to Czech, I don't know. But I went to a Czech, you would call it maybe post-graduate textile school because Berdenau was full of textile factories. And the so-called English cloth that was so famous really came from Berdenau and was treated in England. You know, they had a special process they treated it with. But it was woven in Berdenau. So she send me to a textile school which did not interest me at all. I mean, we had to learn all about textile machinery and -- well, there was a possibility that perhaps I could become a designer. My mother still saw that we could live a normal life. But it was a wasted year so far as my future --

Q: So you did go and study textiles.

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A: I did go. I graduated from there. It was a lot of fun because we were only two girls and the rest were all young boys. So we had a good time, not knowing what was waiting for us. So I graduated from there in June of 1939 and we were already occupied by Hitler.

Q: How had your life changed when you became occupied.

A: Well, it all came very gradually. First, we had to wear yellow stars. And then we had a curfew. We couldn't go into the street I think it was seven or eight o'clock in the evening. We had to stay at home. Then we were concentrated into certain streets of the city, which meant that my mother -- because we lived on such a street, we got, so to speak, renters into the apartment. There were several -- there were two families in addition to us in the apartment that was only a three-room apartment with one bathroom.

Q: What did it feel like to wear the star?

A: Well, it was, what is the English word? It was not pleasant.

Q: Upsetting?

A: It was upsetting and it was -- what is the word? -- It was -- well, you know. It made you feel that people were looking down on you.

Q: Demeaning?

A: Demeaning. That was the word I was looking for. So we had all those people in the apartment, which -- for me, it was not so bad because I liked all the people. And I don't know how it was for my mother. But there was nothing we could do against it. And my favorite aunt, who was the only one of her family that left behind, had to move

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to -- had a villa in the suburbs, but her husband was gone. Her three daughters were gone. And she had to move into our neighborhood. That made me very happy.

Q: Were these restrictions frightening to you?

A: Yes. And it became more frightening as time went on. But in the meantime, after graduating from the textile school, I got a job, an unpaid job, in a textile factory out in the country. And I lived there five and a half days of the week and came home for the weekend. And I worked then all phases of the textile industry. The factory still belonged to a Jewish firm. That's, I suppose, how I got the job, although it was unpaid. But it was good training for me had I ever gone into that field, which I don't think I would have under normal circumstances. So I was home only over the weekend.

Q: Were there any anti-Semitic incidents that you were aware of, particular to you, at that time besides the general restrictions? The non-Jews that you came in contact with were still pleasant to you?

A: No, they were nothing at all. You know, they did not -- they were not in touch with me. Like my school friends. I never heard from them. And we were forbidden to have telephones, so we could telephone only from a neighboring store that had a telephone, but only at certain hours. Because Jews were not allowed to go into those shops, except from 2:00 to 3:00, or whatever it was. So if you had to make a telephone call, you had to make it during those certain hours. And I remember meeting one of my classmates in such a store and being afraid what she would do or say. But she didn't do or say anything. She just make-believe she didn't see me.

Q: When you were working at the textile factory, were there non-Jews with you?

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A: Yes.

Q: And what were--

A: Mostly non-Jews. They were very nice. They were Czech peasants. Moravian peasants. There was no -- I didn't feel any anti-Semitism. In fact, some of those people came to town on weekends and came to visit us in the apartment and brought food from the country for us. So no, I didn't suffer there.

Q: Were you on food rationing at that point?

A: I think so, yes. But I don't really remember -- yes, I think we were. Because I remember, you know, going shopping to those stores during certain hours and having those ration cards with me.

Q: So what did you do on the weekend when you would come home from the textile factory?

A: See my friends. Or my uncle, my mother's brother, who will figure a lot in this interview, I think --

Q: What is his name?

A: Norbert Troller (ph). He and I were the only ones who survived the war. And he was _____ in Auschwitz. He was _____ but he made it. My uncle had a weekend house in the country. So we sometimes went there. We still could go hiding, you know. As long as we kept within the hours allowed to us.

Q: Did you have a radio?

A: Yes, we had a radio. We had a radio when, I think we rented a radio when my father was so sick for a whole year. But then we had a radio when Hitler was already occupying us, which we inherited from a relative who immigrated. And I remember

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sitting in front of it and hearing about _____ in our time. But it didn't get to me. I was so --

Q: Were you aware of the invasion of Poland in September of 1939?

A: Yes, of course. And their outbreak of the war. Yes, naturally.

Q: Now, you were a young woman of 19.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you recall any thoughts that you had at that point? Was it a very fearful time for you?

A: Yes it was because one was always afraid what was coming next. You see, and we knew about things in Germany and in Austria. But there it went much slower. It took some time after this or that. Whereas with us, it all came pretty fast. All the _____, all the restriction, all came very fast.

Q: What was the next change then? You had finished the work in the textile factory and then --

A: Yes.

Q: What was the next development?

A: That was the end, I think. I worked. That's about all that was left to me. I went to take care in the afternoon, after, of a group of children who were, I don't know, maybe four children. And I went hiking with them. I did their schoolwork.

Q: Are we talking about 1939?

A: Yeah. And long -- I don't know how long I did that -- as long as it was possible. They were a family of several sisters and only two husbands, I think. They all had children and I did the schoolwork with them and I went sledding with them.

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Q: These were Jewish children?

A: Jewish children. They all went to Theresienstadt, too, but I don't know that any of them survived.

Q: So 1939 continued on. Now it's winter, 1940. Any particular --

A: I can't really say exactly what happened in winter 1940. I know in December 1941.

Q: So your life went on, in a sense, in the same way. And -- how was your health at that time? 1940, 1941.

A: Oh, health was okay.

Q: And the food situation?

A: Was not so good. But my mother, and I think most people were able to get things on the black market, like coffee for instance. There was no real coffee. But we were able to get some black coffee. Um cigarettes. I was smoking by then unfortunately.

Q: And you were still speaking German with your mother?

A: I was still speaking German with my mother. In fact, my mother -- you know, her Czech was, it was called _____, which means Kitchen Czech. She just could talk Czech with the maids -- with the maid, we had only one.

Q: You've been talking about 1940 and '41 and how did conditions change even more?

A: There was less food to be had. And I guess, the hours were shorter and we were -- the hours we could shop were shorter. And you couldn't sit on the park bench because it said there, "Not for Jews." You couldn't go to a coffee house or a restaurant. It was all forbidden to Jews. So you'd spend most of your time doing your

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chores and being at home and shopping when you could or visiting friends when you could.

Q: What did you and your friends talk about during this time of terrible restriction?

A: I don't remember. I know we couldn't go -- we loved movies; we couldn't go to movies anymore. But we could read. I remember reading *Gone with the Wind*, day and night.

Q: In what language?

A: In German, of course. And, I guess we talked about boys. Oh, I never talked about Tom Shtunda (ph), that was a very important part of our life in normal times, you know. We had so-called dancing lessons, but what it really was was -- we didn't learn to dance. Somehow, we knew how to dance and that's where you met boys. Get dates with boys.

Q: Did that continue on in 1940?

A: The dates as far as people and young men were still there continued, but not the dancing classes.

Q: Well now, it's 1941.

A: And then the deportation started. And we had -- I remember we had a poor Jewish lady who came to us for the midday meal, which was the main meal, every week. It was sort of immensurate (ph), if you know what I mean. And she was one of the first who had to go because she was not a Czech citizen. Maybe she was from Germany or Austria, I don't know. She had to -- she went to Poland with the first transport. Then, I don't know, but it was in the same transport and a cousin of my mother's, one of the owners of the fur business, where my father later worked, he and his two

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daughters -- the mother was no longer alive -- were also sent to Poland, which was unheard of because he was very well-to-do. And why they had to go, I don't know.

Q: You knew that they were being taken to Poland?

A: That's what they said; that's what we were told. And then, Theresienstadt was founded and my mother's oldest brother, the one where we used to have our _____, and his family, which consisted of his wife and three children -- no, no. The youngest son had immigrated to England, but the two older sons were still at home. They were sent away, we didn't know where.

Q: What month in '41 was the first transport in Berdenau.

A: I think in November. But December came and it was our turn. And we had no idea where we were going. But we went to Theresienstadt.

Q: Okay. Let's talk a little bit about that. How did you know? How were you called up?

A: Some time before that, we had to register at the Jewish Community. All Jews had to register. I don't know if all did, but we did. Most Jews did. And the way we learned about it was that you got some sort of printed paper under the door where you were called for a certain day to a school. That's where we all were assembled. And they taught you exactly how much, what you can take. I think it was 50 kilos if I'm not mistaken. And you were allowed to take blankets, you know, feather blankets. And a pail, I guess for washing the floor, but that's what we were allowed to. And I remember my mother packing for this trip and putting a whole little pail again of jam into that pail and covering it up with other things. And I was very upset about it. I thought they would catch her with that and we would be punished. It was very cowardly. But

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fortunately, my mother wasn't and it was a very good thing that she brought the pail of jam. And you know, friends who rested (ph) in here came to help us. And I remember a class-- a Jewish classmate of mine who had learned to be a -- what is it? It's my age; I can't think of what -- a pollster. He came and sewed for us something to cover those feather beds. We each had something -- it was a handle so that we could carry. And the housekeeper and someone else came to -- you must know that in our bathroom, you had to heat a huge stove. Stove?

Q: A heater of water? A water heater?

A: But it wasn't gas. You had to use a _____ in coal I guess. And she came and attended to the stove so that we all could take a bath, the ones who had to go. And the people were very kind and helped out. You know, things that you could possibly use were immediately sold out, like flashlights. You know, we all wanted to take flashlights, so it was very hard to get them. Things like that that you could possibly use. And so we ran this in the school -- Well, first of all, I have to say that -- not transport -- that we had to walk to the school at night, when it was dark, so that the population wouldn't see it. And then we spent I think three days in the school, where we were registered and the SS was already in there, or the Gestapo, I don't know.

Q: What was the name of the school? Do you remember?

A: Yes. No, the name I don't know. But the street (ph), it was Merhout.

Q: And about how many people?

A: You know, I don't remember, but probably a thousand. Transports usually were a thousand, but I'm really not sure about that.

Q: So you stayed there for three days.

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A: We stayed there --

Q: Where did you sleep?

A: On the floor. And we young ones helped with the luggage, you know, to get it up the stairs because I think it was a three-story school.

Q: What about food?

A: You know, I don't remember anything about it, whether they fed us or not. I don't know. I just remember then, on the third day, early in the morning, we had to stand at attention in the courtyard there. It was still dark. And then, again, we walked to the train, which left from the usual station. I don't know how the -- well, it was night. And I guess no other trains left.

Q: These were regular train cars?

A: These were regular train cars, yes. And on the way, we somehow learned that we were going to Theresienstadt.

Q: Did you know what that meant then?

A: I don't think so. Of course, my mother's older brother was already there. But they were not allowed to write. So I don't think we knew it.

Q: How long a trip was it?

A: I think it took days, if I'm not mistaken. I don't know why. Maybe it didn't. I really don't remember. But we were really one of the earliest transports, so we left behind everything we had left. The furniture, the --

Q: Were people calm on this train ride to Theresienstadt?

A: I have no recollection. I think I was calm. But only because I was young, you know. I didn't -- we had no idea what was in store for us. And I mean almost also of those

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three and a half years when I was in Persna (ph), I always thought it would be better in the next place. So optimism helps, I think, but it's the optimism of youth.

Q: So you arrived at Theresienstadt.

A: We arrived at Theresienstadt and were put into barracks, you know.

Q: You and your mother were still together.

A: Yes. We were still together. And first, we were in the smaller room. I think we were the first people in this particular barracks.

Q: Did the barrack have a number or--

A: A name. They called it _____, which was a spelling for -- in English, it's The Raisin, isn't it? So it was called Dresdner Barracks. And this was strictly women's barracks. The men lived in the Sudatin barracks.

Q: And about how many women were in your barrack with you?

A: Well, really, I think we were the first -- no, we couldn't have been the first transport because my aunt was already there, the wife of my mother's oldest brother. I don't know -- I think there was room for 3,000 people. There were 3,000 when the barracks were filled. But in the beginning, there were not many people. And we picked the smaller room. There were maybe ten people in there.

Q: Now when you came there, you were with your mother. Were you with any other relatives or friends? Or was it just the two of you?

A: I think it was just the two of us. And of course we came to know all the others who were there.

Q: And what did you do in the beginning?

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A: Nothing, I think. We just made it as comfortable as possible with our blankets and we slept on the floor, of course. And I'll tell you a typical story for me. One day, things started to disappear from our luggage. And we couldn't understand it -- or I certainly couldn't understand it. And I remember asking my mother, "Mother, do you think that Jews steal?" I couldn't imagine that Jews would steal one from the other. I learned much better later on. But I eventually worked in the post office. You will laugh about the post office. It was like that in the first few months at Theresienstadt. The Czechs believed in the town. And we were in the barracks and were not allowed out. But there were some people who were allowed out, like the guard -- not guards. They were the ghetto policemen who watched over each barracks. And they could go to their administration I think. There were certain people who were allowed out. But I think June 1942, the Czechs still lived in their houses there. Then they were evacuated and then the ghetto was opened, you know. Then we could go out. But we left soon after that so I didn't experience that. But as long as we were confined to the barracks, I worked. Every barracks had a post office, which was a room. And since the men were separated from their wives and children, they wrote letters to each other. Or the husbands sent dirty laundry to their wives to wash.

Q: From the men's barrack to the women's barrack.

A: To the women's barrack. Or the women sent the clean laundry back. And if someone had two extra potatoes, he could send it to his wife or his children and so on. And that was -- that kept me busy. And I met a lot of people that way because I had to go and distribute. I had to put the room numbers on the letters and then distribute them. And my mother worked -- I just saw that, I'd forgotten it, but when I

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started reading the letter, she worked in the office of the -- each barracks had a Jewish commander. And she worked in the office for him. And we later on moved to a different room where his wife was also in that room. So maybe that's how she got the job. I don't remember that. And of course, there was not much food. And they gave us soup made from -- I don't know what that is. You know, it's like -- it's a vegetable and it's big.

Q: Turnips?

A: Turnips. Yeah. They were orange. Everything was made with turnips, which in Czechoslovakia they were used to feed the cattle, the pigs. You must have learned about turnips in your other interviews. And we got a piece of bread and sometimes margarine, sometimes jam.

Q: Whatever happened with the jam that your mother put in the pail.

A: I guess we ate it in the course of time.

Q: And so you stayed in Theresienstadt for six months.

A: No, then I still went. I voluntarily went to a place in Bohemia where they needed people to plant trees.

Q: Now when was this?

A: This was from Theresienstadt, maybe in May. May of '42. I'm not sure it was May, but I think so. And I didn't tell my mother, but when she heard this and I told her eventually, she volunteered to go along on the transport because she felt we shouldn't be separated, which we later were.

Q: So the two of you left in May.

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A: We left in May and we were there for maybe six weeks. And in a way, it was a very fortunate thing because we wrote to some of our friends who were still there --

Q: Still in Theresienstadt?

A: No, still in Czechoslovakia, not yet in Theresienstadt. You see, it took some time after they got all the Jews in Czechoslovakia to Theresienstadt. And we did this so, you know, everyday we went for supper to an inn in the country. There were various places in Bohemia where we did this work. But in that place where I was with my mother, we went to supper everyday to a certain inn. And there we talk to the owner of the inn and asked him whether it would be alright if we had a package sent to him, to his address. And we always told the people to whom we wrote what name to write us, to send a -- by then, we recognized which was for us, you know? Because other people did the same thing. And so we collected quite a bit of food, which we brought back to Theresienstadt.

Q: Okay, now what kind of work did you do for six weeks? You planted trees?

A: Trees, yeah.

Q: Was that hard work?

A: For us, it wasn't so hard, for the young people, you know. But for my mother it was very hard. And the man in charge of us was very nasty to her and kept talking about the old _____ can't do her work and so on. So that was hard. But she took it in her stride. And so, we came back to Theresienstadt. In the meantime, my uncle Norbert Troller had arrived there. And I don't know if he was there when we left or not, I don't know. But anyhow, he had lost so much weight. He had always been a

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roly poly, you know. And he was terribly thin and of course, we were very happy to have brought that food in to contribute to his subsistence. He became stronger again.

Q: Now your back at Theresienstadt.

A: Now we are back at Theresienstadt in June. As I said, the Czechs were evacuated and then, in the meantime, there were more and more people coming of course. There was, for instance, a transport from Vienna where a sister of my grandmother's was in there. And it was just terrible for the old people. There was no room anymore and they put them in the cellars and--

Q: Did you know that she was there?

A: Yes.

Q: You did know.

A: Yes, we did know she was there.

Q: How did you know this? How did you find out? Word of mouth?

A: Probably word of mouth, yeah. By that time, we were allowed to go out, and so we went to visit her. She died soon after that, fortunately. But by that time, Theresienstadt was full, full of people from everywhere. Germany, and also, I don't remember that, but I remember this old aunt, Tanta Fritzen (ph). Also, my favorite aunt, you know, the one I told you about who was left in Berdenau, and all her family was gone. She came to Theresienstadt, too, and she became a nurse there.

Q: What was her name?

A: Amie (ph) Weiner. And I loved her almost as much as my father, much more than my mother. So I was very happy she was there.

Q: So this was your father's sister.

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A: My father's older sister.

Q: What else do you remember about the summer of 1942 at Theresienstadt?

A: Transports left for the East all the time. We had no idea where they were going. It was a rumor it was to Poland, but we didn't really know. And the most important thing in Theresienstadt laws, to have connections to get out of a transport, not to have to go. Because there at least, we knew what we had. And we did not know what was waiting for us. So mother and I got into transport twice, I think. And once, I had a boyfriend there who was a ghetto policeman. And he said that we were engaged, which we were not. And ghetto policemen could save people. So he saved us that time, or at least, I think it was him. We don't really know. And then, I think there was a second time where possibly my uncle, Norry (ph) is his name, saved us because he was in the technical department. He was an architect. And the technical department had a lot of clout. And so he said that my mother was his sister and we couldn't possibly go. And so we didn't go. But the third time, it didn't work anymore, and. . . You want me to tell you something about Theresienstadt?

Q: Well, did you do any work over the summer?

A: Yes, I was again in the post office.

Q: Oh, you went back to the post office.

A: Back to the post office, yes.

Q: And a minimal amount of food.

A: Minimal amount of food. One unusual thing in Theresienstadt was that they made dumplings, Czech dumplings, which I'm sure did not exist in any other concentration

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camp. And that was always day of joy when they made dumplings. They were so big, you know, and inside was jam. And of course, we were very happy about that.

Q: Did you go back to your -- did you live in the same room?

A: In the same room. Well no. Maybe, you know. Maybe it was in between the first room and the second room. I really don't remember, but altogether we were only in two rooms, my mother and I.

Q: Did people eat in a central location?

A: No, no. You ate in your room.

Q: In your room.

A: You sat on your mattress on the floor, and that's where you -- you had to stand in line to get your food. Each barracks had a kitchen. And that's where you stood in line to get your food or to get your bread, whatever you got.

Q: What was a typical breakfast in Theresienstadt?

A: It was something they called coffee, but it was just brown water, and a piece of bread which had to last you all day long.

Q: And then lunch was. . .

A: Lunch was I think -- lunch was the main meal, so it must have been that horrible soup. What is the name of the vegetable?

Q: Turnip.

A: Yeah, turnip soup. And bread again.

Q: And then dinner?

A: And then dinner? It was again turnip soup and bread, and maybe that's when we got the dumpling, or maybe it was at lunch, I don't know.

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Q: How often was dumping day? Once a week?

A: Once a week perhaps.

Q: And what was the sanitary facilities like in your barracks?

A: Well, there was a big sort of washroom. Since it was the barracks for soldiers, there were maybe 20 spigots there where you washed with cold water. And you know, I don't remember anything about the toilets. They must have had lots of toilets. Anyhow, I don't remember any hardship with toilets there. And at least we had plenty of cold water. The funny thing was that, you know in Europe, people put their bedding into the windows to air out. Everyone does, all over Europe. And we did it, even in Theresienstadt because there were sort of, what do you call them?

Q: Archway?

A: Yes. Arches. There was a walkway to the various rooms and then those archways. And we put our bedding out there to air every morning. Maybe that's why we didn't have _____ or lice. Because later, we had that too.

Q: You said your health was okay, still, at that point.

A: Yes. Our health was okay.

Q: Alright. And so the summer is over and now it's September 1st.

A: Yeah, or a few days before then. We got the summons that we had to go. And my boss in the post office, he was the head over all administration post office. And he said that he knew the man who was the guy, the top man on the transport. And he would tell him about me, that if he needed any help, a secretary or whatever, that he recommended me. And then we were put into a separate barracks, those who went on the transport, and where they, again, I think for three days. And my mother met

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some distant relative whom she hadn't seen for years and years, who had a daughter. And she introduced us. And then that also prompted a boyfriend there with whom I thought I fell in love. But I think it was just leaning on someone, you know. And then we started. We were loaded into the train. I have no recollection how we got to the train. We must have walked, but I can't imagine that we carried all the luggage.

End of Tape One

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Tape Two

Q: We were talking about your being called up in September 1942. And you were taken out of your barracks, and for three days, in a different location, with your mother.

A: And then we were loaded on the train and travelled northeast, I guess. We had no idea where we were because the train, in the beginning, never stopped, or maybe I was too involved with my boyfriend to pay attention where we were going. But I remember we stopped in Riga which is the capitol of Latvia.

Q: Was this a regular train?

A: This was a regular train, not a freight train -- not that other persons were on the -- no. What do you mean by regular --?

Q: Yeah, you were sitting on benches?

A: Yes. We were sitting on benches. And we stopped here and there and they distributed some food and water which we had gotten along from Theresienstadt. And so that we had something to eat and we had something to drink. And I remember at one of those stops, I saw a woman in a white nursing uniform with a red cross on her cap, distributing water. And she was blonde and blue-eyed and I thought, "That must be someone from the Swedish Red Cross." As it turned out later, I was with her in camp for a long time and she was from my home town. I had never seen her before. She had a very Scandinavian name; her name was Inga (ph) Sylten. But she was Jewish. And so, yes, my mother, who as I told you was a very smart, wrote a postcard to someone at home and threw it out of the window, hoping someone would

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get it. Whether someone got it, I don't know. And even-- as I told you, we stopped in Riga, and word got around that they wanted us to get out there. But we did not.

Q: Were you ever allowed off the train during the journey?

A: No, no. I guess there were toilets. I don't remember. No, were never allowed off the train except for the people who came around with the food and the water and so on. They went outside train. And so we went on from Riga. And the whole thing took five days and five nights, that I know. And finally we came to a small station, which as it turned out later was in Estonia. Estonia is the northern-most of the three bounty countries (ph). And there were some SS men out there and we all got out of the train-- No, before we got out of the train, they came in and they distributed postcards. And they said that we could write home; that we were working in agricultural environment, and that we are fine. So we all did this. Whether they ever sent it, I don't know. But just imagine that they think up something like that just for shame, you know.

Q: Do you remember who you addressed it to?

A: No. No idea. My mother did it, I'm sure. Maybe I did it too. I don't remember. So then, we got out of the train. And those SS men were standing there telling some to go where blue, light blue buses were standing. They told them to go there. And some they picked out, mostly young people, and said that they should help unload the luggage.

Q: Now what city is this? Where are you?

A: It's not even a city. It's a small place called Raasiku.

Q: This is in Estonia?

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A: In Estonia, yeah. And the men were, I think, mostly Estonian SS because we saw them later. They were Estonian. But there were some Germans there too. And so I was picked out to help with the luggage. And my mother was sent on ahead. And we each had in our hand a pillow, a pillowcase, to which was folded the fur from our--we came to Theresienstadt with a cold and the fur lining, which could be buttoned in. So this was summer, so the fur lining was out, and it was in those two pillows. And my mother went ahead, and then I ran after her and gave her my pillow and said, "Look, I will have to work and we'll meet later. You take both." And they told us that they would meet those people who go in buses later on in the camp. So we helped unloading the luggage, which I don't remember having done, but I must have done it. And then they put the luggage and us on trucks. And we drove and came into the woods; and there was like a camp there, wooden barracks. About five wooden barracks with the -- you should have come five years earlier when I still could think of words.

Q: It will come to you later. That's fine.

A: Yeah. Surrounded by barbed wire and towers with soldiers up there with guns. And I had some hand luggage. And I went into -- I saw that there was a line of people lined up in front of one of those barracks. But I went to another barrack and put my hand luggage there.

Q: What the transport made up of men and women?

A: Men and women, yes.

Q: Were there any young children?

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A: Yes. There were children. And they picked out about -- I would say about 50 women and 50 men. Only the men did not come with us. I don't know what -- they came into a different camp, but around there too because once, we were allowed to see them. So I left my hand luggage in the barrack, but I myself, stupid as I am, I went into the line where the other people stood in line to get into this one barrack. I had no idea what that was. And when my turn came, it was pitch dark in the barrack. And there those SS men who made us undress and do all sorts of gymnastics. They went through what -- I probably had a purse, you know, and they found various things in there that they wanted to have. Took them out. Then we had to exercise so if we had anything in our vagina that it would fall out. And it was pretty awful, you know, to undress completely in front of those men. But there was nothing we could do. So then, when we got through, we just walked out -- got dressed and walked out and went into the barrack where I had left my luggage. You know, if I had just stayed there, I probably wouldn't have had to go through all that. But that's how naive I was. So then they unloaded all the luggage and put it in another barrack. And then we lived in this barrack -- yeah, our families were not there. So we asked them, "You said we would meet our families here." And they said, "Well, we sent them to a camp that is heatable" (It was September, you know.) "so they wouldn't freeze in winter."

Q: Were you with anybody you knew at that point?

A: No. Only this one young girl -- remember, my mother had met a relative in the separate barracks there? She was only 15 or 16 years old. I was 22. Not yet 22. No, yes, just 22. She was the only one. And there were some girls there -- there were mostly young girls -- who cried terribly because they were separated from their

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families. And most of us couldn't understand that. Why were they sent there and the camp had deceived them? We were going to see them again. So we lived for I don't know how many years, two years or more, thinking we would see our families again. We never heard about gassing or shooting. We had never heard about anything like that. So we spent our time unpacking the luggage. You know that it didn't occur to us, "How come-- what do the other people wear whose luggage it is?" It didn't occur to -- or at least not to me. And of course, we had the advantage that if we found something we could use, we took it. But there was also from the luggage jewelry that we gave to the Germans, and money. You know I told you, in the dark barrack how he took things out of my pocketbook. For instance, I had -- it was a pencil, you know like an automatic pencil? But it was a much thicker pencil which my uncle had given me. He used it in his work as an architect. And he had given me that with rolled up money in there. They took it. So they must have known that people hide things. So then, you know, the clothes had to be sorted into, I don't know, dresses and shoes and whatever. And those SS people took them away by and by. But we found food there, too, so we cooked for ourselves, you know, we found alcohol stoves on which we could cook. And we just used them. And we found our own things, of course, which came in very handy later on because we exchanged them for food with the peasants and other people in Estonia so that we were not as starved as most people.

Q: So you lived in this first barrack that you came and put your --

A: where I had put my bag down.

Q: How big a barrack was it?

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A: Mmm. I don't know. There were about 50 of us. And you know, there were two wooden platforms -- downstairs and upstairs -- and we lived --

Q: That's where you slept, on the platform.

A: That's where we lived, that's where we cooked. We just did all of it there. That was like our home. And people formed group. And I formed a group, I think, with this 16-year-old girl.

Q: What was the youngest age there? Do you remember?

A: That was the youngest.

Q: She was the youngest.

A: She was the youngest and we christened her "Baby," Baby Nada (ph) we called her. She still had the name. She lives in Israel. Her husband doesn't like it at all that we call her that. So you know, gradually, friendships developed and certain people moved in together and cooked together and shared everything.

Q: Did you do any work?

A: Only the sorting -- unpacking and sorting --

Q: Was your work.

A: Was our work, yes.

Q: And you said you were there for two years?

A: No, no. Not in that camp.

Q: Oh, oh, okay.

A: No. We were -- I then was -- of course the Germans, or the SS elected -- not elected, but stipulated a leader of the group of us. And she happened to be a schizophrenic individual, I think. And for instance, she picked -- there was to go a

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transport for work to an acre _____ place, and I was picked because I spoke German. So she was against German speakers. There were about 25 or 30 of us who were sent on the transport. The others stayed in the barracks and still worked with the luggage, you know? And that was pretty tough because we didn't get enough to eat and we had to work very hard.

Q: Where were you sent to?

A: It was in the coun-- you want to know the name? I can find it if you want.

Q: But was this a permanent move or just a temporary move?

A: No, it was just a temporary one.

Q: Oh, to go and work and then come back.

A: Yeah, but we took everything we had, which wasn't much, along. And it was sort of --

Q: What kind of work did you do there?

A: We harvested potatoes and carrots. And there was a man who supervised us who had a --

Q: Whip?

A: A whip, yes.

Q: The clothes you were wearing were the clothes that you brought from home originally?

A: Yes.

Q: That's what you were wearing.

A: That's what we were wearing.

Q: Were you still wearing a scarf?

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A: I don't know if we did there or not. I don't think so. I know that when we later came to Reval, which is Tallinn today, they made us take off the scarves. So maybe we still had them. Because they didn't want the population of Tallinn to know who we were. And so we were there, I think, harvesting for about six weeks. It was really back-breaking work which we were not used to.

Q: And then you came back.

A: Then we came back, and they separated us to a different barrack. We were not to have been in touch with the others who had stayed there, like if we were paryas (ph). And so we were still in the barrack in winter. And we didn't do any work, except that they took us out about once a day to collect wood in the woods there for burning in our stove. And they brought us food, whatever there was. I don't remember, that at all. And I was made to be in charge -- oh, I forgot -- of this particular group in the barracks because he remembered my name 'cause they had once caught -- I forgot to tell you, you know, when we -- I told you we met a man once, the men who went on our transport were in a different camp, but close by. They let us get together one day, one Sunday, so that some of the girls saw their fathers and their brothers. And I saw my boyfriend and then I discovered a very good friend of my father's, you know, a man probably in his fifties, whose wife had probably gone with my mother. But they had picked him so he must have looked pretty healthy. And when I saw him walking by later, I threw him a package with socks and things I had from food to that I had found in the luggage there. And this one of those SS men remember me because of that, because I was caught, you know? And he was caught, but they didn't do anything to us. But he remembered me. And that's why he made -- he remember my

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name and he put me in charge of the people in this barracks we had come back from work. Now I'm the least likely person to lead a group and I know I always had to find someone who would clean the toilets. I remember the toilets there. And no one wanted to do it. And so in the end, I said I'd do it. That's how much of a leader I was. So we were there, back in the woods, and then they said we were going to Tallinn, which was Reval then. And we would work in making clothes, you know, like a manufacturer of coats or dresses or whatever, which was an absolute lie. But that's what they said. And they took us -- now those were most -- I forgot to say something again. I think that happened while we were in _____ on the potato farms that another transport came from Germany, from Berlin and Frankfurt. And they again picked out the young people. And -- mostly young, there were a few older men among us. And so they moved in with those other people. And then the call came for us to go to Reval, and there were some of the Germans went and we went in separate barrack, in the red barrack. And they brought us to the police. And we stayed in the political _____, in Reval.

Q: Okay. What month was this that you left --

A: This was, I think, December.

Q: Of '42.

A: Of '42, yeah.

Q: Okay. And how far away was Reval from where you were? Not far?

A: Not very far because I don't remember how far it was then, but I was there in 1992. The barracks don't exist anymore, but the place where my mother -- where all the families were shot is there, and it's not too far.

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Q: Not too far.

A: It's maybe half an hour. So let's say this was perhaps an hour.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: And --

Q: So you just walked there?

A: No, no. On trucks.

Q: On trucks.

A: No one ever tried to run away. I mean later on some tried but not seriously. So there, they put us to work for a German construction firm by the name of -- I know the name very well -- Holzmann. And the head of that -- well, let me tell you about the prison first. We were in rather modern cells where we were ten people to a cell.

Q: Ten women?

A: Ten women, yes. And there were only seven beds there. The beds were just -- they could be -- they were made out of metal and canvas, and then --

Q: Could be folded up?

A: Folded up to the wall. So there were seven beds and ten people. Then there was a cabinet there to put our things. And then in one corner, we had our _____, you know. So, we're also very fair, you see. We changed beds. Always different people had to -- one had to sleep on the cabinet. No, yes. And two on the floor, one on the luggage and one on the floor and several in the beds. But we always took turns. And in the morning, the guards came -- they were women. And throwing the raw fish heads on the floor that we were supposed to eat for breakfast. And then again some brown water that was the coffee, and I think a piece of bread, either in the morning,

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or we got it in the evening, I don't remember. So with that we were supposed to do hard labor in the harbor, in the port. And we were tearing down -- see the Russians had attacked Estonia -- was it -- first a Jew-- no. The Russians had attacked Estonia and the harbor was in disrepair, all the barracks, whatever, the little houses, they had -- it was all kaput (ph). And so this firm of Holzmann was charged with rebuilding the harbor. And on the first day, when we went to work, the man in charge of Holzmann, his name was Gr_____. He was a not very tall man with a red beard and red hair. He had us a long speech saying that if one tried to escape, that ten would be shot. So that put us in our place. And every morning, some man from the firm came to get us out of the prison and march us to the harbor, which was not very far.

Q: What kind of work did you do?

A: We did -- some of us, you know, create the _____. And then we worked on. .

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Q: Piers?

A: Well some of us work with a diver, with a German diver who -- I don't know, maybe he -- I don't know what he was looking for. But he was diving and they had to keep him alive. Most of those men were pretty good to us. And then there were some Polish men too. They were the so-called Folks Deutsche (ph). They made believe that they were German-speaking, but some of them were not. They didn't know German. They -- some of them were pretty anti-Semitic. But altogether, they were not really anti-Semitic and I think it had to do with the fact that we were all young girls and pretty good-looking. So most of them treated us alright. And one of them was also from Frankfurt. He was in charge of the whole group. And he picked out some

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girls who came from Frankfurt, and really was like a father to them. And brought them food and let them do all sorts of things. And -- after the war, he still came to New York to visit them. He's dead now. But he was pretty decent.

Q: What was his name?

A: Hohmann.

Q: So, now you said you --

A: We cleared the way to the harbor. Some of us _____. Then we had to unload trucks with building stones -- not -- help me with the word. You know what I mean.

Q: Building blocks?

A: Building blocks, yes. Something like that.

Q: And you still had energy? You were able to do this even though your diet was so poor?

A: Well, let me tell you, the Germans later on gave us an extra meal because they really needed us. So we got some extra food from them. And then, as I said, we exchanged things that we still had for butter and bread and eggs and whatever we could get. Some of the girls learned how to -- bricks is the word I was looking for -- how to --

Q: Lay bricks?

A: Lay bricks, yes. And there were all sorts of --

Q: And how long did you stay there?

A: I think we stayed for at least a year.

Q: A year. Doing this kind of work.

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A: Doing this kind of work. And I remember one day, when it was minus 28 Celsius, which is very cold, so that even the Germans were not really to go to work, and we didn't have to go to work. So that was very nice.

Q: And you -- what about your shoes? Did you have good shoes?

A: Well, some of us did and some of us didn't anymore. But we also tried to exchange things we had for shoes. Whatever we needed, we tried to find someone who would do that.

Q: So, again, you were still pretty healthy.

A: We were still pretty healthy. My health didn't break down until in Hamburg. But the -- no, no, no, that's not true. In the next camp. So, yes, comparatively healthy, we were really.

Q: So you kept living in the barracks and working all day long. Was it a long day?

A: No, we lived in the prison.

Q: Excuse me, in the prison.

A: Yes, we worked all day long, also on Saturday. But not on Sunday.

Q: What did you do on Sunday?

A: On Sunday, we were in our room in the prison and we talked and we sewed.

Q: Were people optimistic? The young women?

A: Yes. Really. But you know, there are so many things that I have to come back to because -- I don't know if you want me to. Should I just go on?

Q: No, it's -- everything is --

A: For instance, when we left, we still thought that our families were alive. And for instance, when we were going to Reval, we had to bring all our stuff that we were

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taking along to a meadow, and the SS went through it. And for instance, I had sewn together two of those feather blankets. That's not the right word. I have it now. What is it?

Q: A comforter? or feather pillow?

A: No, no. It was a comforter, but with feathers inside. Down -- down whatever.

Q: Quilt?

A: Quilt. Yeah, maybe quilt. And I had sewn a whole dress and stockings and underwear and everything for my mother in between those two blankets and sewn it together. But of course, they found out, you know? They ripped it apart and there was all that. So we always tried to look out for them, still hoping, you know. But later on, for instance, when we worked in Reval -- we did not always work in the ports. Sometimes they sent us to a different assignment, like, once we were in a sewing mill and two of us always tried to get out of that and we went begging, which had two purposes. First of all, to get something to eat. And secondly to -- if the people were friendly -- to ask did they know anything about any other camps. So we found out about another camp and we thought that maybe our families were there. The camp was Kloga. And others told us that they are not alive anymore. But we didn't believe them. So yeah. We sometimes went to other assignments and it was always a joy, something different, something new. One of my friends in the camp -- I mean in Estonia -- was from a mixed marriage. Her father was Jewish and her mother was not. And they still lived in Prague. And one or two of those Germans who were in charge of her went to visit the parents and I'm sure got some money from them and

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brought stuff back for her -- money and food and so on. So you know, some of them were real decent.

Q: So you went back and forth, working at the pier and then going to do other things.

A: Yeah. But mostly at the pier. That was our main job. And as I said, we were not allowed to wear the stars. But eventually, something must have happened because for a week or so, we were not allowed to go to work. And then they sent us to another camp. And we were not able to say goodbye to those construction workers and --

Q: This is after being there for a year.

A: Yes.

Q: So this is the end of '42, beginning of

A: No, end of '43. And so then we were sent into another camp which was called Ereda. And there were already Lithuanian and Polish Jews -- most of them men and women.

Q: When you said "we were sent," does that mean the whole camp?

A: This whole group.

Q: How big was this group that you were talking about?

A: It must be -- I don't know, maybe 80.

Q: 80?

A: I don't know exactly, but I think something like that. And there were already Polish and Lithuanian Jews, most of them were from Vilna, which is probably familiar to you. And now they told us -- first of all, we heard Yiddish for the first time in our lives. It didn't exist in Czechoslovakia or in Germany -- maybe it did, but I don't think so. And so we had -- at first, we had trouble understanding them. But we did because it's a

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really sort of similar to German. Only some words will really confuse you. Like, I remember one told me “_____.” The word, the peasants. And I thought -
-nacht in German is night -- how do they get out at night to go to the peasants to get
some food? So it turned out nachten (ph) means yesterday.

Q: Were these all women?

A: No, men and women. A mixed group. and we were in the same camp.

Q: Again, did you live in a barrack?

A: We lived in barracks, yes. The men had separate barracks from us.

Q: Still wearing your own clothes.

A: Still wearing our own clothes and no star. I don't think we had to -- no.

Q: How clean were these places?

A: That camp was terrible. And you know, the toilets were really -- were not toilets. It
was a big --

Q: Latrine?

A: Latrine, yes. That's the word. And you had to go for ten minutes to get there. It
was all mud in the camp in winter anyhow. And some of it dried up fortunately. So
then you had a place in front of each barrack where you could go -- should go only if
you urinate -- at night so that you don't have to go. And we tried to keep it clean, you
know. We had brushes and cleaned it with water and soap. We tried to keep it as
clean as possible. But eventually we had lice and we had all sorts of vermin. Fleas.
Fleas we already had. I forgot to mention. You know there was a time in the prison
when all the ones who had stayed back in the first camp were brought to prison. But
then they moved us all into rooms in another part of the prison. We were no longer

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in those cells, but in those rooms. And we had straw pallets which were full of fleas. So that was awful.

Q: You yourself got fleas?

A: Yes. I remember I had a pajama that put a rubber band around here so that they couldn't get in and to my sleeves too, but it didn't help. They got in. Oh yes. We had fleas, and lice I think we acquired in Ereda. And then people starting having typhoid fever -- no, typhus. But the lice transmitted.

Q: Were you getting your menstrual period during those years?

A: No, in fact, it first started in Theresienstadt that people stopped having their menstrual. And there was one year a girl in our room who was so -- she was married and she was worried to death that she was pregnant -- because we didn't know that. I don't know anymore how long I had my menstrual period, but I lost it, too, which was a blessing because there were times where we didn't have any material to protect us.

Q: So what kind of work did you do in Ereda?

A: We did very, very hard work. Felling trees -- do you say felling? And then carrying them on our shoulders. It was really very hard work. And eventually, I just said, "I can't do that." And I went to one of the doctors in the camp -- they were Jews -- and told him couldn't they assign me to something else, that I just can't do that kind of work. We -- well, we felled trees and cut them up and then we started building barracks in the woods someplace else.

Q: You were felling trees with axes? You yourself were swinging an ax?

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A: Yes. And what we were building there, in the woods, was another camp, which we didn't know. But some of our people then later went to the camp.

Q: Who were your guards?

A: Our guards were --

Q: Were they German guards? Were they --

A: Yeah, they [the commanders] were German. They were all German in that camp. But the guards, if there were guards, which I can't think -- you know, they were really German SS. But not the guards -- I don't remember that we had any guards, but maybe we did.

Q: Watching over you?

A: We must have had, but I have no recollection of that.

Q: And how were you treated? Were you ever mis-- I know you said the work was very physically difficult, but were you mistreated some by the SS? You yourself? Did you yourself have any particular. . .

A: I don't think I was mistreated there.

Q: And how long did you stay in that camp?

A: In that camp. If I knew when we came -- that was in winter.

Q: Winter of '44 you said, the beginning of '44.

A: The beginning of '44 and -- let me think. No it can't have been winter '44. It must have been '43.

Q: End of '43, beginning of '44.

A: Yes, yes. I think end of '43, beginning of '44. And I don't remember any guards in the camp, but there must have been. I just can't remember.

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Q: And your clothes and everything --

A: Most everything had been taken away. Either taken away or sold by us. We didn't have very much anymore. And of course we --

Q: Did you have any sweaters? I was gonna say sweaters or coats, gloves?

A: No, no. We didn't. Well, we made do with what we had or we exchanged things. I remember I had a short, warm coat. I don't know where I got it. And I gave it to this Inga Sylten. I must tell you a story about Inga Sylten which is really like a novel.. There was an SS commander this particular camp. I even know his name. It was Drosin. He fell in love with her and she with him. And she work -- there was a separate barrack where the commander lived. She worked as a, you know, cleaning up. And this friend of mine of mixed parentage was the cook. She was a very good cook. So she knew about what was going on between Inga and this man, but I will say that Inga behaved very well. She always spoke up for us and he minded her. And I remember, for instance, that there came the command that we had to have our heads shaved. They started shaving the heads and she finally convinced him he shouldn't do that. And so he stopped the whole thing. But to make a long story short, the two escaped together because word about what was going on got to Germany to his superiors and they sent another SS commander and before he even came, I think, they escaped together and hid in the woods. But they caught them. You know, there was a -- they just came from all sides. And he shot her and shot himself. So when we learned that, we knew it for sure. So anyhow.

Q: So you stayed in Ereda?

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A: Ereda. I stayed there until late in 1944. And I had a male friend there, too, from -- he even -- I have the -- I'm relieving this to the Holocaust Museum, but I'm not parting with it yet. I had a young man friend there who had this ring made for me. There were people in the camp who were very clever with their hands. I don't know where they got the silver, but they did. And so I still have the ring.

Q: And what does the ring say?

A: The ring gives my name on top and on the inside is his name.

Q: And his name is what?

A: Isaac.

Q: What was his last name?

A: I can't remember. I asked my friend the other day and I can't remember what's his name. But I got a letter after the war from a relative of his who was in Paris at the time who also had been in camp with us. And he told me that Isaac had died in _____.

Q: So you stayed there until late 1944.

A: We stayed until late 1944.

Q: Anybody else try to escape besides the couple that you told us about?

A: I understand yes. But I don't know personally about it.

Q: Did it ever occur to you to try to escape?

A: No. I was too cowardly. But I know several young women when we were in Tallinn who had offers from Estonians who worked on boats to take them to Finland. But no one ever had the courage to do it because they told us if one escapes, ten will be shot.

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Q: And then what happened at the end of 1944?

A: End of 1944, the Russians were coming closer and one could hear shooting. And so they brought -- they evacuated us back to Germany.

Q: How did you get there?

A: Well they first brought us by train to a place called Lagedi, which was outside Reval, I think. And that's where we lived for six weeks under the -- just with no protection at all. There were no tents, no anything. Just on the -- in the meadows.

Q: You slept outside.

A: We slept outside. That's where they finally shaved my hair. And we were there for six weeks. It didn't rain once. Like if God had -- or the breath of God had been looking out for us.

Q: Why did they shave your hair?

A: I think because of the lice. Or that's what they said, you know? They shaved all the -- for us, it was very late in the game.

Q: That was the first time.

A: For us, it was the first time. You know, they had made an attempt in the beginning, in Ereda, but Inga stopped them. But that's where they finally did it.

Q: What did that feel like?

A: Terrible. Terrible. Sometimes I see young women on TV nowadays. Like yesterday, I saw someone -- or this morning -- a singer with such very short hair. So, how can she do that to herself. Yes, and I was very -- I didn't even talk about -- but still in Ereda, I became very sick. I had been very high temperature, but there was a barrack for sick people. But I didn't want to go there because I was afraid they would

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do away with me. So I just existed with the high temperature. And then we came to Lagedi and I really felt terribly sick. The doctor, the Jewish doctor, thought I probably had --

Q: Typhoid?

A: No.

Q: Small pox? Diphtheria?

A: No. You know when the white of your eye becomes yellow?

Q: Jaundice?

A: Hepatitis. And people were put to work digging ditches to defend themselves against -- the Germans against the Russians. But I was so weak I just couldn't do it and I sort of went into a meadow and laid down there and just laid. And two SS officers came by. And I was sure they would shoot me because I wasn't working but they just looked and went away. So that was good luck. Then, after six weeks, they put us on a freighter -- or on a boat -- and we -- again, I was very sick. I didn't know what was going on.

Q: Were you able to walk?

A: No. I was just lying there.

Q: They carried you onto a boat?

A: Well, I probably walked on my own, with support. But on the boat, I didn't walk. That's what I meant. And, I don't know how long we were on the boat. Then they transferred us to a Kanai (ph) boat. And where we were so crammed in that I couldn't even sit or lie down. We were just like standing up like sardines. That I survived, that is a miracle.

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Q: This is this group of women? Or men and women?

A: This was men and women, yeah. And we came to Stutthof, which was a big camp in eastern Germany. And there, we had to undress completely and go under the showers. We didn't know about gas, not yet. We had heard about shootings and so on. But gas we didn't know. So it was -- they were real showers. It wasn't gas. And I still have another treasure from the -- this is a watch that I had at home with me. I carried it with me all the time. And in Stutthof, when we were under the show -- first I had hidden it in the soap. And then I thought they would probably take the soap away from me, so I put it in my mouth, soapy as it was. And so, of course it didn't survive. But I still have it.

Q: Whose watch is that?

A: That's my watch.

Q: Oh, that's your own --

A: from home.

Q: From home, that's you've kept with you all that time.

A: All that time. Yes, and I had written a diary in Estonia. I wrote a diary everyday. But now, when I saw they took everything away from us, I gave it to a man who was also a prisoner there, and said would he save it for me? And he said yes. But I never saw it again.

Q: You had brought the diary with you from home.

A: No, from Estonia. I had written a diary while we were in Estonia. And I never, unfortunately, saw it again.

Q: What did you do in Stutthof?

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A: In Stutthof, nothing. We were just sitting in the sand. In the sand. And I met several people there from my hometown who had been in Riga. And there were daughters with mothers. One daughter, one mother. Two couples like that. And one of these couples, one daughter and mother, survived. The daughter lives in Vienna now. And the other couple did not survive. So you know, you just ran into those people. It was an immense camp. And we didn't own anything. I didn't even have a spoon to eat with. But someone else shared her spoon with me.

Q: Do you remember what they gave you to eat?

A: No. Very little. Nothing, probably. There was something. Soup. Perhaps again, the turnip soup. I don't really know because it was the first real concentration camp that I had been to. And it was pretty awful. And thousands of women there -- the women were separate again.

Q: And where did they finally put you there? You said you were on the sand in the beginning.

A: Well we were in barracks.

Q: You went into barracks.

A: Yes, we were in barracks. But there was and all around where we sat around all day long.

Q: Did you work?

A: No, we didn't work. We were not there for very long.

Q: How long were you there for?

A: I can tell you exactly. We came there on my birthday, August 26, 1944. And in October, we were sent on to Hamburg in Germany. I think that's enough. Do you still

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feel like it? In Hamburg, which was Hamburg Oxensal (ph), I became very sick immediately. I had pneumonia and I think I had typhoid, but this is not for sure. Pneumonia and pleurisy and typhoid and a terrible diarrhea, probably enteritis or it may have been typhoid, I don't know. And after a month or so, they built a barrack which they called the _____, where the sick people were sent. There were only, I think, six or seven of us in there. And I was there for what seems like months, but I don't know, really, how long it was. But I survived, which was a miracle in itself. And my best friend was at that time the Schreiberen (ph) in this camp. She was in charge of counting people and she was the secretary to the SS man and so on. And she arranged for me not to have to go to the factory, but to be in the Schneiderstubben (ph) which was the place where they did sewing for the Germans. There were a lot of SS men and women there and there was a professional seamstress, also a Jewish lady, from Frankfurt. So that's where I ended up working. And then one day in April, they said that we would be sent -- that we are being sent to Sweden now. And we couldn't quite believe it, but they said it. So they put us on into cattle cars and we travelled and on the way we saw open cattle cars with dead people in there. And then they unloaded us in, I think it was called Lüneburg, and from there, we walked to Bergen-Belsen. So the thing with Sweden was not at all true. It was just another of those lies.

Q: What was it like to be in the cattle car?

A: Terrible. You know. We all know how that is. Because there was no air and no food and just a pail, I guess. I really don't remember. It was terrible. And to see those cars filled with dead people. . . It was just awful. Of course, in the cattle cars, there

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were little windows up there we could see through. Anyhow, they unloaded us there and we were marched to Bergen-Belsen. And on the side of the road, in the ditches, there were dead people everywhere. That was in April '45, shortly before Bergen-Belsen was liberated. We got into Bergen-Belsen and what it was like there, I knew that I couldn't survive that. Well, fortunately, I didn't have to survive it there because three days later, the highest SS from Hamburg came back and said the factory needed people. And he started reading all our numbers. But since I had never worked in the factory, he didn't read my number, but not everyone was around, so when no one responded to a number, I went there because my two best friends were there.

Q: When had you been originally assigned a number? In the beginning?

A: Well, I had one in Theresienstadt.

Q: You had different ones in different camps?

A: I don't know. I don't know if I had the same number all the time or whether they changed it. So anyhow, I joined this group. And he marched us out of Bergen-Belsen, along the Lagge Strassen (ph) where on one side there was a band that played music and across from it was a big hall with people just -- dead people just --

Q: Piled up?

A: Piled up. And so we came out of there. We marched along the road and there were --

End of Tape Two

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Tape Three

Q: You were talking about your journey from Bergen-Belsen back to Hamburg in April of 1945.

A: And there were fliers thrown down from some airplane telling that the British were close and that they would soon be here. We did not save the flier, but it was very good to know about. And the men had to march us -- I forget to where because the _____ had been bombed. There were no more trains leading to Lüneburg or -- no, the place was Tellebeiden (ph) Hanover. That's where they unloaded us when we went to Bergen-Belsen. You know, after the war, I read in *Time* magazine some letter to the editor from someone who lives in Tallinn. Either that -- I'm not sure. Anyhow, they said that they didn't know there was Bergen-Belsen there. When all the dead people were lying close to the road. Anyhow, this guy marched us to -- I don't know where. We slept in the woods, covering us with leaves. We didn't run away. We got back to Bergen-Belsen. And when we got there, there was a whole new crew there.

Q: Back to Hamburg.

A: Hamburg _____. It was filled with people from other camps who had been evacuated there. And so we never went back to the factory to work. But we registered those new prisoners. That was our new job. And then one day --

Q: Your health had improved by that time?

A: Yeah. Yeah.

Q: Did you get better because you were given medicine? Or was this--

A: No, there was no medicine. There was no --

Q: So it was the resting and not working.

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A: Just being in bed and not working. But it was for a long time. I remember when I, for the first time, went into the bathroom, there were mirrors there. And I just couldn't believe it when I saw myself. I said, "I look like Christ at the cross." So we were used to register the new prisoners. And then one day, toward the end of April, they said, "Now we will go to Sweden." Again, you see. So of course, we didn't believe it. But, lo and behold, we really went, in cattle cars, and got out in Flannsburg (ph), which is the border between Germany and Denmark. And there we were -- there was already a normal train standing. And we were taken over by the Danish Red Cross. And on every seat, there was a package. Little satin breeches and chocolates. Then we came through Copenhagen, and the Danes were on the platforms -- I remember one day holding up a newspaper saying "Hitler Dead." And of course, it was wonderful to hear that. So then we went by train and they unloaded us onto a boat, you know, a ferry. And there they had papers sent for. And I never got to read (ph) anything because it was so -- you know, everyone just threw himself on those papers -- flowers and anything you can imagine. And then we arrived in _____. I don't know -- I think we went on the train once more after the ferry. I'm not sure. And in _____, we were taken over by -- I guess it was the Red Cross. And we had to, once again, undress completely and they burnt all our clothes. And so that was, I don't know, the 2nd of May maybe. And then we had to run into some pens and take showers there. They had it all set up. It was wonderful. And they put us -- after we were all bathed and so on -- they put us in a covered tennis stadium where we slept on the floor. But for us, it was joyous because they had white sheets -- white paper sheets, you know.

Q: Could you believe you were free?

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A: It was hard. But they apparently knew exactly what to do because they fed us very little. And we, of course, thought they should feed us much more. But in Bergen -- as we later heard -- in Bergen-Belsen, it was a catastrophe. People died from eating too much. And you know, the Swedes gave us new clothes. We went to factories and picked from clothes and underwear. Everything. But that was before the end of the war. You know, the war, I think, ended on the 8th of May or 7th of May. So for us, the war was over.

Q: And then you stayed in Sweden for how long?

A: I stayed there for two years because it took so long to get a visa to the United States where I had an uncle, my mother's middle brother, who was the only one who was able to immigrate. He's the one who I told you that they came from Vienna, first to Czechoslovakia, and they eventually landed in the United States.

Q: Did you work in Sweden at all?

A: Yes.

Q: What kind of work did you do?

A: I worked as an English-German secretary in the World Jewish Congress office. So that was very nice. It was like a family. When I went back to Sweden in '92, I looked for the World Jewish Congress. It was no longer there. They've closed it. They don't need it anymore. But they certainly needed it then.

Q: Were you able to adjust to life in Sweden after all that you had been through?

A: Yes. Actually, yes. I mean, I'm not -- still not quite --

Q: But you were able to cope, get through those two years.

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A: Yes. I was able to work, yes. And in the beginning, my two best friends were there. But we had a room together, a furnished room and a family. And we all three worked --

Q: These were friends from the camp.

A: Yes. And one of them left first. She went back to Czechoslovakia because her sister and the sister's husband had returned. They were in camp too because -- well, it's a long immoral story. The sister, of course, was Jewish. But the husband was not. And they had -- her father and my friend's father had hidden in the village on false papers. And someone told on him. And so then they sent his daughter and her husband to camp, too. But just for a year, so they both survived.

Q: So you got -- when did you arrive in the United States?

A: On May 19th, 1947.

Q: And where did you go?

A: I went to New York. And my uncle had already found me a job in an import/export firm. And I had a furnished room in a family again. West 86th Street. But those were difficult times. It was, you know, what they call culture shock. It was all so different from Sweden. And I was very unhappy at first. It took me some time to get used to the climate. It was so hard. Altogether, you know, at the World Jewish Congress, I told you we were all like a family. And there, the people who owned the business were not at all friendly. It was all so cold, unfeeling. And no one wanted to hear about my experience, not even my own uncle, you know? No one asked any questions and we were so full of them.

Q: And then you stayed in New York?

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A: I stayed in New York for two years and then I got married and moved to Chicago.

Q: Was your husband from Europe?

A: Yes.

Q: Had he been through the war?

A: No, he was here during the war.

Q: And you moved to Chicago.

A: I moved to Chicago and then we moved to Pittsburgh. And last, we moved to Washington and really like it here. I'm glad I ended up here.

Q: Can we talk just a little bit before we close about some of your feelings and reflections and thoughts about what you went through? How do you feel about being Jewish? Did this experience make you more so or less so or no change at all?

A: Maybe less so. No, not Jewish. It made me more Jewish, but it made me irreligious. I don't believe in God, I'm afraid to say.

Q: This is because of what you went through during that.

A: Yes. I don't think, if there were a God, he would have let all that happen. No. But I'm consciously Jewish. I would never hide it. But I'm just not religious.

Q: Do you receive reparations?

A: Yes. I get two pensions. One is like Social Security. And the other one is what they call Gesundheitschon (ph). I had to prove that the experience was bad for my health. And since then, I'm getting a pension for that.

Q: How do you feel about getting reparations for your time?

A: I now feel about it very good. But it was the hardest thing I went through, you know? To dig all the things out and everything the lawyer wanted from me, you know?

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I was in psychotherapy for several years. And it was not easy. Every time a letter came from the lawyer in Germany, I thought, No, what now? What would he want now? But in the end of course, it's -- I could not live from the pension I get here. So that makes a big difference in my life and my lifestyle.

Q: You say you returned to visit in Europe?

A: Oh yeah. I've been in Europe many times. But in '92, I was back in Estonia because that was just 15 years af-- I never told you about what happened to my mother and the others. You want me to tell you?

Q: If you think you're able to.

A: After the war, when we were first -- remember, I told you we were at _____. And then they sent us for recuperation to various places in Sweden. And my Czech friends and I were in a town called _____. And there one day -- there we didn't do anything, you know. They were just nice to us. And we went on hikes and had fun together and bicycles and so on. And one day, they had a sort of a little feast for us where there came a couple of ministers -- I forget of what religion. And they lectured to us -- I forget about what. And afterwards, there was coffee and cake. There were maybe 30 or 40 of us in the scout hall where we were. And I just happened to sit next to one of those ministers and another friend -- the mixed one -- sat on the other side of him. And he asked me where we had been during the war and I told him about Estonia and so on. And he said, "Strange with Estonia, you know? I have a friend, and Estonian minister, who told me a terrible story about transport that came to Arazecu (ph). (I don't know whether he said Arazecu (ph)) that came and that some members of his congregation had to shoot those people. And that some of them

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became quite emotionally sick from it." And from what he said -- of course, he didn't know the details -- I thought that could be us, you know? So he gave me the name and address of this minister. And it took me awhile. I didn't arrive right away or beware go to see him -- and I never did go to see him. I think I just didn't want to know really. But I did write him a letter and he wrote me a letter back saying such-and-such happened. That the people had to dig their own graves and were shot on the spot. And he wrote bad words. But he wrote very, you know, consolingly that maybe our families were not among those people because he remembers that there were some Jewish women seen in Reval working there. And maybe that's where my mother was. And so -- so of course, that was us. And so that was that. And then in 1960 -- I think in 1960 -- how did that come about? Well, I can't tell you the whole story. However, they caught some of those Estonian SS people and -- I mean I can tell you the story, but it would be too long -- and some of our friends who lived in Czechoslovakia -- went to Tallinn as witnesses in the trial of those people.

Q: Trial of the Estonian SS.

A: Yes. And two of them were hanged. And others were convicted in absentia. And one of them was the commander -- Laak was his name -- and he -- it turned out that he had immigrated. He had fled after the war to Canada. And the Russians were broadcasting -- there was news about the trial all the time -- and that they were looking for him. And he apparently got frightened and he hanged himself in Canada. So one of our girls was living in Canada. And she -- when she read in the paper about it, she called the newspaper and said that she was one of his victims. And then the newspapers interviewed some others of our girls in New York. And one called me,

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too. I was living in Chicago then. So you know, three of them, at least, are dead. And then -- while the girls were testifying, they took them to that place where it all had happened. And there is a monument there now. And it's not, apparently not only our transport, the German transport. They also killed some Russians, I think. So it -- on the monument, it was in all languages, I think. And so in 1992, we went there for the fiftieth anniversary of those times, of the day. And one of our friends who was also at the trial as a witness now lives in Switzerland. She escaped in 1968 with her husband. And she really built friendships there in Estonia, and they go there quite frequently to visit. And, you see, this woman, Eugenia _____ works for the Jewish community there. Yeah, this -- Eugenia _____ works for the Jewish community in Tallinn. And she worked on this book for years. She was already working on it in 1992. She found all the documents and it's all about the Estonian Jews and what happened to them.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't talked about? Or any other thoughts?

A: Oh, I'm sure there are other things.

Q: Your reflections that you'd like to say?

A: The reflections are --

Q: Or any messages to the world? Anything that you'd like to add?

A: The reflections are that I cannot stop to hate the Germans. I would never set foot there. But not all of our girls feel that way because some had been there. But I personally just don't want to do it. And I have -- as I told you earlier -- I have all those conflicting feelings about my former classmates. And I'm very attracted to reading

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everything about the Holocaust. Where some people like to stay away, I'm very attracted to it. My uncle, Norbert Troller (ph), wrote the book about Theresienstadt which was published after he died. But he wrote -- that was his retirement job. He wrote his memoirs, not only about the war, but about his whole life.

Q: Do you still speak German?

A: Yes. That read German a lot, too. And I have friends, but very few now, with whom I speak German. Now with Eva I never speak German.

Q: Anything else you wanted to add before we close?

A: No, close it. That's enough.

Q: Well, thank you.

A: I'm very glad that you came to talk to me and I didn't have to talk to a complete stranger.

Q: Well thank you so much for doing the interview.

A: You're very welcome.

Conclusion of Interview