

RG-50.120 #0202  
TARSI, VERA

- 1.00.45 Vera Aizenberg Tarsi was born on May 20, 1923, in Uzhgorod. When Vera was born, her town belonged to Czechoslovakia. When she was one year old, the family moved to Prague. They had a small factory of perfumes and cosmetics. Her parents were 39 and 40 when Vera was born. She was an only child, and felt always very protected. The family had a huge dog. She remembers her father reading to her at her bedside. The book? Altmenland. She always cried in certain parts of it. Much music and art in her home, and in her world. She was the only Jew in her school. Some kids taunted her for that. At home, they spoke Hungarian, German and Czech. She asked her father, after the taunting at school, 'What am I?' The father replied: 'Never forget you are a Jew.' This is how her Zionist education began, at age 8.
- 03.42 She is transferred to a French school.
- 05.00 She remembers going to the opera in 1938, and the tension in the streets was great. In 1939, the radio announced that the Germans had crossed into Czechoslovakia. She decided to go to school, anyway. She was 16. The school sent all the Jewish students home. Vera's father decided she could continue in the English institute. [Vera was very good in languages.]
- 08.37 Vera succeeded in passing the entrance exams to the university both in English and French. She managed to do that before the universities were shut down.
- 09.30 Vera's father had been an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army. When the Germans came, he began his efforts to obtain a Hungarian passport, not an easy feat.
- 09.54 There were still no restrictions to the Jews to be in public. They came in 1940-1941. Jewish doctors could only treat Jewish patients; prohibition to go to the movies. But lawyers had to stop their practices immediately, and they were the first to be deported, in 1941.
- 12.01 At the end of 1941, Vera's father had someone appointed over him; he was employed as an 'expert' but did not have the authority to decide anything. The acting 'director' was a German businessman. He treated them well. At the end of her English studies, Vera went to work in her father's factory as well.
- 13.49 For an entire year, even after the deportations to Terezin began, Vera was

still working for her father. But, after Heydrich's murder, things began to change. The family had been scheduled for deportation, but Vera's father called the Hungarian consul in Prague [with whom he had served during the war] and the consul arranged passports for the family in 24 hours. Then, he called the Gestapo to have the family removed from the list.

- 16.00 The family had to move elsewhere. They didn't want to go to Terezin because they suspected something wrong. Also, from Lodz they received letters too short to be true. There were rumors about the fate of the Jews in Poland.
- 18.40 Family decides to move to Hungary, but because of Heydrich's murder, the borders were hermetically closed.
- 22.56 In August, 1942, the killers of Heydrich were caught, and the borders re-opened. They were given 24 hrs. to leave Prague.
- 24.00 Vera remembers growing up with the voice of Hitler broadcasted throughout town, his hysterical tirades against the Jews. She remembers the marching boots and the harsh knocking on the doors, looking for Jews guilty of some crime.
- 30.40 The move to Budapest, through Vienna.
- 38.43 Found a residence in Buda.
- 39.01 Father was too sick to work. Vera decided to look for work in order to support the family. The war was not felt in Hungary. The Jews were free to go about their business.
- 40.00 Vera is hired to teach English and French to two sisters, in a 24 room 'villa'. It belonged to Jews who converted away from Judaism. They didn't believe what Vera told them about the situation of the Jews in Prague. But, in the meantime, Hungary began to be bombarded by Both Russian and British forces. The attacks lasted 2 months.
- 44.57 Vera was the bread winner for about 22 years. Mother became a typical housewife for the first time in her life. She kept informed of world events through the radio [BBC], including the Warsaw ghetto uprising.
- 51.00 They knew about Dachau, about ghettos, but didn't know about extermination. There was a diffused panic, but they didn't know exactly what. She saw what the Germans were capable of, in Prague.
- 55.04 March 1944. Until then, the strong Hungarian antisemitism expressed itself

- in many ways; boycott of Jewish stores, not hiring them for certain jobs.
- 57.56 Mother wanted to go back to her birth place; Vera and her father didn't agree. They stayed in Budapest. All the Jews in the periphery were eventually deported and killed.
- 58.00 In March 1944, the Germans were suddenly there. As long as Horthy was in power, he protected the Jews.
- 59.00 First measure against the Jews was to forbid them from leaving their residences, except for an hour everyday to shop.
- 2.03.11 Ghetto is established near the big synagogue.
- 03.55 The Glass House where passports of neutral countries are issued to Jews in order to save them [Swiss, Swedish and another country she doesn't remember]. There were only 7500 passports. Vera's family did not get one. But, in the Glass House, the Zionist movement established a 'factory' for those kind of passports. Vera's family got a Swiss one. With that, they could move to the 'protected houses' on the shores of the Danube.
- 06.01 How the fake passport was obtained. It was expensive.
- 07.08 Deportation to Auschwitz of the Jews in the countryside begins. In Budapest they didn't know what Auschwitz meant: they thought it was a very bad place in Poland.
- 10.43 Vera's family moved to the crowded 'protected house' in August-Sept. Horthy wanted to sign an armistice with the Germans, and get the war over with [like in Rumania]. But the Hungarian fascists didn't agree, and Zsalasi overturned the gov't. The situation of the Jews worsened.
- 13.35 In Sept. 1944 a Jewish woman appeared, looking for Jews. She had fled Auschwitz. It was the first time they heard what that place really was. Vera and others did not believe her, especially about the ovens and the gas. That survivor also mentioned the selections within the camp, and also the name Mengele. [Also showed the number on her arm.]
- 18.00 Vera's mother decided that for the winter they need to retrieve their blankets from the old house. The 2 women shed the yellow patch, and walked there. On the way, they - and many others - are rounded out. The Jews were beaten into rows, and taken to Obuda, to an abandoned brick factory. Hundreds of Jews were already there; they had been taken from the streets, the ghettos and the 'protected houses'. No passport helped. It was the month of November. They spent the night in the cold,

sitting on the ground, and hungry. The next day a large truck appeared. A very tall man came out. [Vera later found out it was Raoul Wallenberg.] He demanded that all those with passports be let go. A negotiation ensued between Wallenberg, the Hungarian gendarmes, and one SS man. After 2-3 hours, they were let go.

24.00 Russians were already 60 km from Budapest, in Solnok, and made a siege around the city, so that it was impossible to extract the Jews from Budapest.

25.53 Bombardments intensified; Jews didn't have where to hide. Lack of food.

26.55 On Dec. 24, 1944, the battle for Budapest began.

27.00 A few days before, German soldiers came looking for canned food, in exchange for bread. They were getting ready to withdraw.

28.04 That year, Chanukah began on the same night as Christmas; in the dark, without food. In great panic, they found a little candle and lit it, and sang. Maoz Tzur... and they hoped. In the midst of the heavy bombardment, the Hungarians would get the Jews out of their homes, in order to clean the debris from the streets.

30.00 There was no water. It was very cold; all the windows had been broken from artillery attacks.

31.31 The attack continued until Jan. 14, 1945. On that day, they all woke up to a heavy bombardment. The Germans fled, with their cannons, and as they were retreating they blew up all the bridges. One day, Vera woke up to a deafening silence. The Germans were there no more.

33.13 Russians entered the city. However, the Germans were in Buda, and they kept bombarding Vera's Pest for another month.

35.48 Population is warned about the behavior of the incoming Russian army.

37.04 Vera tells of leaving her house, and finding herself disoriented, due to the destruction around; she remembers walking between dead horses, people and soldiers strewn through the streets. She was immune to the sights, as though everything was as it was supposed to be after a war. Her only objective in life was to find food for the family for that day. Money had lost its value. Father couldn't help in searching for food; he had already suffered 2 strokes in Prague. He only wanted to stay alive to see the end of the war and return to Prague. Commerce was done on the basis of trading a few valuables for food. Russians had food.

- 42.00 Vera goes to work at the newly opened Czech embassy, in Budapest. Their man job was to organize the repatriation of the refugees. Many came from Auschwitz. The embassy provided the Czech refugees with an ID card and a basked of food staples [the Joint provided this].
- 43.40 Through these refugees, Vera heard what Auschwitz was.
- 47.00 Vera realizes the war was over [and so is the harsh winter] in April 1945. On her way home from work, looking for food, she ran into a Russian officer. He asked her if she was a Jew. She says yes. Then, he asked her if she knew where to get matzoth. She was taken aback. He said 'do you know it is April, Passover is coming?' She looked around and saw that the snow had melted, and instead nature began to blossom again. She said 'the only thing I know is that I am hungry'. He took her in his jeep to the army base, and provided her with the staples to feed the entire building. the officer warned the soldiers not to 'start' with her, because she was a nice girl. The officer took her back home in his jeep.
- 48.00 In search of a new place to live.
- 50.00 The disappearance of Vera's boy friend at the hands of the Russians. He was never found, now was it ever known why he was taken.
- 54.00 Death of Vera's father. Mother had gone to Prague. There was no communication, and Vera had to make all the arrangements by herself.
- 58.15 Vera returns to Prague.
- 3.04.10 Visit to her father's factory-lab which, in the meantime, had been expropriated by the communists and was now owned by the workers. Cold reception.
- 05.55 Vera's mourning over her father and the 6 years of war.
- 6.36 The house was expropriated suddenly, and [they?] became homeless suddenly.
- 7.48 Encounter with Rafi Ben Shalom, who was working for the illegal immigration to Palestine. Vera is hired as office worker of the Israel agency and the Zionist organization. Her duties there.
- 11.51 Vera meets her husband there. He had survived Auschwitz and contracted TB. He was sent to heal in Switzerland, where Vera and he

were wed in one of her visits.

13.38 Vera immigrated to Israel after its declaration. The family arrived in Israel with a baby already. Cooperation between Israel and Czechoslovakia. Vera and family left for Israel in March 1949. The last group of Jews allowed to leave Czechoslovakia in May, 1949.

16.34 The family settled in a kibbutz. Vera's mother stayed behind, in order to try to get back her possessions.

18.00 Vera's reflections on her visit to Prague with her husband and children.