

NATIONAL LIFE STORY COLLECTION
LIVING MEMORY OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY
FREDA WINEMAN
interviewed by Taffy Sassoon

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

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Collection Title: The Living Memory of the Jewish Community

Interviewee's surname: WINEMAN

Title: Mrs.

Interviewee's forenames: Freda (Dvora Frieda) nee
Silberberg

Date of Birth: 6.9.23

Sex: Female

Date(s) of recording: November 1988-January 1989

Location of interview: Interviewee's home

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F140 Side A

The date of the first interview is 22nd November, 1988.

You were saying that you'd like to think about the background.

Yes, I would like to think about the background of what I feel is important you should know, you know, that we came from a small town in Lorraine, called Sarreguemines, which had a nice Jewish community.

Could you just spell the name of the town please?

Yes, Sarreguemines, in Moselle. We had a very nice community, some were actual people who had been for hundreds of years in Alsace Lorraine. I can't say the same about myself, because my parents originally came from abroad. My father from Lodz, and my mother from Frankfurt-am-Main. My father originally came first to Strasbourg, in 1919, and stayed only for a while, went back to Germany or Poland, I don't know, and married later, in 1921, my mother, in Frankfurt-am-Main. They came both from a very Orthodox background. They lived in Germany then, and stayed until 1922, because my brother was still born in Frankfurt-am-Main, and I was born in 1923, which means that they were already in Metz at the time. We first lived in Metz, because I remember, I must have been about eight years old before we actually moved to Sarreguemines, which was a smaller city, and we were sent to the local school, to the Grammar School, the Lycee, and I eventually had to go to the École Supérieure of the Jeunes Filles, for girls only, because apparently I was a real tomboy, I broke my arm, and my father decided that I would be better off in a girls'

school, next door. We were, I was the second one, which means I had two younger brothers, the older one is David, and then there was me, my name is really Frieda Dvora, my Birth Certificate is actually Dvora Frieda, but I was called Frieda. And then I have a brother called Armand, and my younger brother, who hasn't survived, was called Marcel. We lived, I went to school there, we lived there till 1939, actually, in 1938, when it looked as though there might be a War, we already went away from Sarreguemines, and we went further into the interior, about 200 miles, because Sarreguemines actually was in front of the Line Maginot, which they thought would save France, but it didn't, so we went already to somewhere in Meurthe Moselle where we stayed for a few months, because my mother was terribly afraid of War, and decided that by the time September was, and there was no War, and the children had to go back to school, so we all returned to Sarreguemines, and we went back to our routine. In 1939, when the War looked imminent, by this time, my father wouldn't hear of it, and he wouldn't move, and only when the whole town was actually evacuated, and left, by train, Sarreguemines was evacuated just before September 3rd, about the end of August. The people from the town went to, near Angouleme, but we had a car, and so my father was a little bit independent, and he said, "We are not going away with the whole town, we are going a few hundred miles, in kilometres, inside France, and we see what happens." So we went there, we got an apartment, and we stayed there, which had interrupted everything this time, and we stayed in Blâmont, in Meurthe Moselle, and it wasn't very long before the Line Maginot was overtaken by the Germans, and the retreat of France, you know, had started. We stayed there, actually, till June, till the Germans were advancing, and we were in that big, big, convoy that left France in June, and retreated, retreated, retreated, till the Germans overtook us near Vichy, and then we were together with the Germans, actually, in Vichy, and my father was still of military age, and my brother was 18, and were

supposed to report to Dijon, so anyway, they didn't go, and the Germans now had occupied that whole part of France, so my father decided we cannot stay on in Vichy, where the Germans are, we go further, we go as far as St. Etienne, it's like putting a pin on a map, and we say, "We go there", you know, we had lost everything. We thought we had taken even whatever we could sell in goodies, and we didn't, in the rush, we had just taken whatever we had wanted to take, you know. And we arrived in St. Etienne, nearly penniless, just with the clothes we were wearing, and a little case, that's all.

How were you travelling?

We were, by now, the car had broken down in Blâmont, we were travelling in a, somebody had a truck, and they put so many people in, and we were, like everybody else, on the road. We reached then St. Etienne, and there we had to find accommodation, and, and by then France was divided, you know, there was a Partition, there was the Vichy Government, called the France Libre, and the rest of France was Occupied. So my father decided, you know, we'd better have to, to find work, you know. My brother was just going to matriculate, and so he said, "You go back and finish, at least, your Matriculation," I was still two years before, so he said, "You'd better find yourself a job", I didn't find a job, he found a job for me, because somebody had to bring in some money. He himself tried to earn money, and my two other brothers went to school. And right away, everything became scarce. You see, by the time the Germans retreated to Vichy, they had plundered already, the other part of France. There was nothing in the shops, there was no food, there was nothing around, and already either had the rations, or you had the 'marché noir', there was already hunger, there was already no food. But at least the Germans had retreated, you know, and we were in France Libre, so it means that we didn't have to wear a yellow star, and we were

known in the neighbourhood, as Jews from Lorraine, not Jews, people from Lorraine, we weren't even actually known as Jews, but my father was a very religious man, and he went to Shul every Friday night, and every Shabbat. It was very difficult to keep kosher, because we had no meat! So you had whatever came along, he wouldn't eat it, but, he didn't touch it, but he still continued to say his prayers in the morning, you know, and to see that his sons go round with a covered head, and as much Jewishness was kept in the home as possible. Shabbat nothing was done, and so on, as little, to keep as near as possible in the circumstances. Well, that was from 1940 to '44. I personally, I, I worked for a very big Company, which was called 'Les Acieries de la Davum Marine'. And they were providing the steel for the Germans, really, to build whatever they needed, you know. So-called it was, for locomotives, you know, it probably was for armament. The only privilege that I had was that I could get nails or, or screws or anything like that, that I could barter in the country for butter, or for potatoes, or a little flour, to keep the family alive, and I used to do that. At weekends, I had a bike, against my father's will, as I was the only daughter, I wasn't even entitled to have a bike, but anyway, during the War,

You weren't entitled to have a what?

A bike. A bicycle. Yes, but we did bicycle, I used to put a bicycle on the train, and then go up in the...near Le Puy in the countryside, and early in the morning at 4 o'clock, I used to take the bicycle and ride up right up in the mountains, to find these peasants who I had to barter with, to get a little bit of food. The trouble was, towards, after '42, when things became very bad, the other part of France was also occupied, so not only did we have the French Police on the station, but we had also the Germans to deal with. So, when I used to come down with my rucksack with food, at the station, plus my bike, I was always trembling,

because the food, I had to hide behind the seat, somewhere, and my bike, because there was the Police and the Germans at the station, but when I arrived in St. Etienne, a couple of hours later, there were again, the French Police and the Germans, that could arrest you any time, and take away your food, you know, it was already a great risk, but if you wanted to survive, you had already to do something about it. The trouble was that in...it became harder and harder to survive foodwise too. So we were not big wine drinkers, so my mother, used to barter the wine for coal, for the winter, and we, she had, not so much me, because it was her generation, she used to visit a Hungarian family in St. Etienne, a very nice lady with a husband and son, and in that same house was a coal merchant, but the day that she went to that house, she went really to the coal merchant, she didn't go to see these people, and when she came down from this coal merchant, the French Milice were standing outside, waiting for these Hungarian people, to arrest them. So they asked my mother, by this time, I didn't tell you, when the Germans came into the Free France, every Jew had a stamp on their 'revitaillement' card, and their Food Card, there was a stamp on it. I cannot remember that we wore a star, but we had a stamp on our card, saying "Juif", so my mother came with that Card, they looked at the card, and they arrested her. She had with her, the whole cards, of the whole family, of the six of us, so when I was on my way home from work, that gentleman, that Hungarian gentleman, the husband of that lady, was waiting for me, to tell me not to go home, they have arrested my wife and son, and they have arrested your mother. So I had two brothers that were coming home from school, I had a brother in hospital, that had just had an eye operation, and this time my father was out in the country to find food, so I came in, up the stairs, with my bicycle, and my brother, not the youngest, the other, said "You know, somebody was here a little while ago, and asked something about insurance. I said there was nobody at home, so he went away." So I already didn't like

that. It was, two seconds later, a knock at the door, it was two Frenchmen, dressed in civilian clothes. I said, "What do you want?" "We have come to arrest you." So I said, "Where are your papers?" But in the meantime, I said to my two brothers, the youngest one, because we had an apartment, it's mountainous region, St. Etienne, from the street it was the first floor. From the back, it was the ground floor, so I said in Lorrainy, in a patois, I said, "Hurry up! Run away." What happened is that my brother, who was only three years younger, he didn't move. The youngest ran out, so by the time, you know, I said "Let me see the papers. I want to see", and I read them slowly so that I give him a chance to run away, because they could have gone in the next room, and run away. So after a while, they shushed me aside, and they went in, and they looked, they looked, they couldn't see my youngest brother, they only saw the other one. They opened the window, and there was my youngest brother who was not 13 yet, he wanted to see what was happening to us, and they brought him in. Now, you see why I gave him a chance to save his life, and for 10 years after I had nightmares about it. I could not forgive myself that he didn't run away. I gave him the chance. So they arrested us, took us to the Gestapo, and put us in, they had prison down there, their prisons. They brought me up for interrogation. There was the Chief of the Gestapo, there was a fellow listening to it with a dog, and his baton, so he started to ask questions. "How many are you?" I said, "We are all here." They knew I was lying, you know. The Chief of the Gestapo didn't say anything. The Milice came in, and said, "She is lying." So the, the one that was specially standing there with his dog and baton, came over and gave me a good walloping.

With the baton?

Yeh. And they continued with the interrogation. And the next thing, they threw me back in the prison downstairs, and

I kept saying, "Why didn't you run away? Why didn't you run away? Why did you stay here?" Anyway, the next day, they brought me up again, and they said "We've got your brother." My brother came out of the operation, two nuns were on both sides, two nuns, and he had his eyes bandaged, and the Gestapo came to the hospital, and they said, "Have you got a David Silberberg here?" They said "That's him." They didn't realise it was the Gestapo, they thought it was a Milice, a French Milice, the French Milice, civilian French Milice.

The nuns,

That's it. And the people in our building, where we lived, didn't realise that the two men waiting outside, that's how dumb the French were, that the two people standing outside, in a car, opposite the road, were only waiting for my father. Because you musn't forget that for every French Jew that they arrested, by now this was the French Jews' turn, till then they arrested foreign Jews, by '44 they arrested everybody, whoever came under. For every Jew the Milice got a pound (the value of 1), so they collected as many Jews as they could get hold of. It was terribly easy, my sister-in-law who recently has done a lot of work in the Archives of St. Etienne, said it was terribly easy, in the Archives I found a list of all the Jews that lived in St. Etienne from '40-'44. All what they had to do was take the list, and go from one to the other, to the other. The heartbreaking thing was that my mother was getting that organised for the winter, you know, we knew it was going to be worse, now, '44-'45, my mother was getting her coals organised for the winter, we had, I don't know, pickled how many eggs, melted how much butter, dug so many potatoes, because we were going to go into hiding again. And my mother had found a Convent in Le Puy, that were ready to accept us for a while, so we were going to go in the next few days, away from St. Etienne, because it was getting worse and worse. French

Jews were just as much at risk. But, you see, by sheer bad luck, my mother happened to be in that house, and so the whole family was taken. And then afterwards, my sister-in-law, who was in Moronne les Bains, French for the last 300 years, you know, old French Jews, joined us too, they only knew her from being reported together, all French Jews by now. And they took everybody they could get hold of. When we were in the train, end of May, we were arrested on 17th May,

'44?

'44. My mother first, then me and my two brothers, then the next day, my older brother, my father next. On the 17th of May we went, I think it, we were seven days in the Caserne in St. Etienne, and after that they put us on a train to Drancy. When I was in the train in St. Etienne, the Chief of the Gestapo came to me, and he said to me, "If it wasn't for your French Milice, you would not be here today with your family." And he said to me, "Don't try to escape", he said, "otherwise your whole family will be shot", you know. Then he said, "They will shoot your family". And he said to me, "You know, whilst we were emptying your apartment, we found a typewriter, and I would like to pay you for it." He said, "Do you have an address where we could send the money?" As crazy as it sounds, after the War, I went to the Company I worked for and they said, "You know, it's very strange, we've got a cheque for you here, we have money for you here." He paid for the typewriter. That was the Chief of the Gestapo. He didn't say I lied. It's the Milice who came in and said I lied. He knew all the time that I was lying, about members of the family. He didn't push it, you understand. He didn't say to that fellow that he should hit me that time.

Was he also French, the one who hit you?

No, no, German.

They were Germans.

You see, he was in a job there, but it was the French who did the job, it was actually the French who did all the arresting in that part of France, and they had it so easy with the list. Once you were in Drancy then you knew what will happen. We didn't know what would happen to us. It was only my mother who was, who had no, you know, my mother had lost confidence in, she said, "It's finished." Once she was arrested she, for her, there was no more hope. She had the fear of the War, already in '38, when she knew there would be War, she was already frightened. In '39, she was already, she couldn't see how we could get out of it, you know. She had this premonition that it was bad, you know. Once in Drancy we met other people, unfortunate, with whom I'm very friendly, Professor Weil, and his wife, and two little children. He had saved 300 young children during the O.S.E. in France, and the day he tried to get into Switzerland, with his family, he was taken. His wife was a schoolfriend of mine. He married her when she was 17, you know, very young. Two little children, one four years old, and one 18 months. Never came back, you know.

The wife and children?

No. They went right into the gas chamber. Well, the convoy, the convoy to Auschwitz, I will go up to then, I think. the convoy to Auschwitz, which left, I don't know how long we were in Drancy, must have been there another week.

And your family were all together?

We were all together there. There was one lady, afterwards I often thought about it. She pretended she was mad, and

she tried not to go on the lorry that was taking her to the station, she pretended she had a child there of 9 or 10, she pretended she was, she was acting mad, so that they wouldn't take her, but in the end they took her, and they plonked her into the rest, and her daughter. When, the convoys usually were of 1200 or 1500 people, you know, that they took out every time, and by the time we arrived, we have now, in fact, I have just received from my sister-in-law, from the Journal Official, that the French have recognised that these people have been murdered in Auschwitz. Until now, the French hadn't really, officially given us an official paper, and now in the Journal Official, "Died in Auschwitz", and, "Murdered in Auschwitz", whatever, it's now official. When we arrived in Auschwitz, we didn't know where we were arriving, it was, in the conditions, the conditions, things were terrible, you know, there were about 125 in one of those wagons.

The cattle cars?

The cattle cars, yes. And from time to time they gave you a drop of water, you know, and there were already terrible scenes, you know, because people had to release themselves, you know, there were no facilities and terrible already.

Did they provide buckets?

Yes, buckets here and there and then they didn't empty it, you know, and people were sick and ill, and the heat! The heat!

How long did it take to get there?

It must have been three, four days. When we arrived in Auschwitz, it must have been June 2nd or 3rd, 3rd, because, I always say it was the 3rd, we lost a bit, the illusion of time, because I said, "What a shame, it's my brother's

birthday", you know, the younger one. I said, "It's his birthday, what a terrible thing for him, to arrive in Auschwitz, on his birthday." When we arrived, the people said quickly, "Give the children to the older women". My mother was 46, you know, but she was older than the one of 25. Behind us was a lovely young Dutch woman, who had given birth in prison, of a little child, I can't remember if it was a boy or a girl. Beautiful young woman with blonde, beautiful blue eyes, I thought she was so gorgeous, and she gave that child to my mother, and I was next to my mother, and my young brother, and I had taken with me, a beautiful coat, you know, a red coat, that I had for the winter, it was hot that morning, but I had that coat, I had to wear it, the coat on me, and so I was already walking towards the crematorium, because, you see, my mother had a baby, it could've been my baby, understand? We didn't know, and there was my young brother, Marcel. I was already quite a way, no further than from here till here, towards the, I didn't know, of course, it was the crematorium, when Mengele called me back. He said, "You go this way." It was that red coat, understand? And this big thing of hair that I had. Something must have clicked, you know, he asked me back. So I said, I was crying away. I said, "I'm not going to be separated from my mother. I am staying with my mother." He said, ...

End of F140 Side A

F140 Side B

... didn't want to be separated from your mother.

No, I really didn't want to leave my mother, and he said, "You go with the young ones over there. The young ones are going to work, and the older ones will look after the children." He looked a terribly smart, well-groomed officer, with a big smile on his face and full of confidence, and I, my mother said, "You know, it's finished, this is the end." And all that I could see was my mother with that baby, and my young brother walking towards another way, and I being pushed to the left, and then I could see my father on the other side, and my two other brothers, and all what I could see, they were just waving, that was the last I saw, I'd seen them. I saw once more my older brother, as we were going out of Birkenau towards this Commando Kanada, which was outside where the Kanada train must have arrived, he was also in a Commando Kanada, by sheer, with men, and he was just passing, and that's the only time we saw each other. Now, this little Dutch lady, you can imagine how she felt, she had given her baby to my mother. So she kept asking me, "Tell me where you live in France. Repeat it, repeat it, I mustn't forget." And whenever she saw me, she said, "Have I got it right? I must remember it right." Gradually, like everybody else, she didn't know if she could still believe, you know, that her little baby or anybody else was alive, but she didn't want to give in. I met her, I think we followed each other in many Camps, at least in two others, she was still with me, and she still kept repeating, and then she died, she died. I saw her, she died. After that, we had...

Excuse me for interrupting, did you know at the time, you didn't know what was happening to your mother and the children?

Nothing. Nothing. So when, that's why I tell you this little bit, then we were taken to this, where they undressed us, you know? They told us to undress, and there they, I had a, some jewellery, they took the jewellery, then they tattooed me. My tattoo is a very nice one, the one who did it, did a nice job, because some of them are enormous tattoos, enormous tattoos. The Jews did it, the Jewish people did the tattoos, and the Jewish people did now the work, they shaved your head, so quickly a few real beautiful young girls from France, realised that maybe if they keep their hair, they might be able to get better jobs, they could perhaps work in offices. They did everything not to have it shaven. There were two exceptions, or three, unfortunately, they gave them a tougher time afterwards, you know, because they managed to, not to have their hair shaved. By now, they had taken everything away, they'd shaven our heads, the jewellery was taken, the clothes were taken, and they took us into a room, as we had no towels to dry, you were taken somewhere where there was suddenly water coming down, if it wasn't water, it could have been gas, but water came, but we didn't know that. Water came down and showered us, then they put us in a room where there was warm heat to dry us in, because we never had towels. And then there was that girl, that I also am a witness, Mala. The girl Mala from Belgium, who spoke 16 languages, and who managed to be an interpreter in the Camp. And we asked for, we came out with questions, "What's happening? What's this? What's that? What are they doing?" You know. And she said to us, "You must not hope to see your people again, no more." And I think that after that, I think I wasn't normal for a few days, because, you know, I still remember that clearly, that I was laughing all the time, you know, the nervous reaction, was that I was all the time laughing. I think I must have been crazy for a few days. I couldn't believe all that. So they gave us a dress, any dress, it didn't have to fit, you know, just something to put over, one shoe with a heel, one without a heel, you

know, two different pairs, and no, nothing, nothing else. Well, I remember giving up the first, the first piece of bread I gave away, because I wanted a toothbrush, so I had a toothbrush at least, no soap, no nothing, you know, but I wanted at least a toothbrush.

Where did you get the toothbrush from?

You know, the older ones, that had already been in the Camp, they could provide, let's say, a toothbrush for a piece of bread, they found a way to have a toothbrush for you, for a piece of bread. So I had a toothbrush, that's all I had. A shoe with a heel, and one without a heel, and I had a dress that had a little white collar, so I tried to look, at least neat, you know, not to look terrible, on top of it, and a good job there was no mirror or nothing, so I could only see my shadow, with two ears, you know.

No underwear?

Maybe a pair of knickers, yes, no, anything, you know, I can't remember anything else. We had first, we didn't have the striped right away, you see, there were too many people arriving at that time, they didn't have those striped uniforms right away for everybody. For the first few days they gave you some of the clothes they had found, you know, and they just let you wear something, and then afterwards they put you in those striped things. The first thing they did, they made us work on trenches, and the trenches happened to be where the tracks were where the trains were arriving in Birkenau, and that's, and I think I went from mad to madder, because I saw the Hungarians arrive. Beautiful people, you know, looking so well, with prams, with babies, with children, not one went in the Camp. They just went straight to the crematorium, when they realised that we were working there, they pushed us away back in the block, but that's how we, several days working there, we saw

another convoy arrive. I said, "From where are you?" They said "Litzmannstadt", which was a ghetto of Lodz, in Poland, who came in, you should have seen what they looked like, the people from the ghetto - thin, with the clothes, you know, they already having gone through so many years of famine, they looked terrible, these people, you know, Jews with beards like that, you know, nobody went in, everybody went past us. You can imagine how we felt, there we had seen the Hungarians, then we had seen the Poles, after that they didn't give us the job any more, because we saw too much, and we were back in the blocks, we weren't allowed out, because convoys after convoys were arriving, the whole of Birkenau, the sky was black, the sky was black, from smoke, we thought it was night time all the time. And then they gave us

There must have been a smell?

Terrible, terrible, terrible. That was,

So you, I mean, you must have immediately realised,

We realised...we realised...we realised that's what was happening. We realised the horrors that were happening, the horror were happening, so when the appeal was, you know, I was heartbroken, depressed, and in a terrible way, because when the Appels (call-up) were in the morning, all what you got for the day, they, they made you get up at 3.30 in the morning for Appel at 4 o'clock, you had to sleep there, six in one of those things, and just one blanket, then when you got up, you had to line up, and you got one gamelle, you know, like this, a gamelle, like in the Army, you know, one big one, a gamelle is like a container, but it's made of

Tin?

Tin, no, tin with some red stuff on it, I don't know.

Enamel?

Enamel, yes, a tin, whatever they, these people brought from the Camp, from coming to the Camps, they used to put everything in the pot and then cook it, it was, everything you could find in that thing, you know, like the soup, which was anything you like was in there, and that, you had a little sip, and then it went down the line, you see, you never had a, a little tin for yourself, that you had one portion, you had a sip and then it went down, that's all what you had to eat for the day. Now, there were some people which I thought at first were lucky, because their mother was with them, but when I saw what happened to the mothers, they collapsed during the Appel, they had diarrhoea, so they made them stand up, and all full of diarrhoea. You see, it was already the Kapos, the Jewish Kapos who looked after us, but they were never alone, you see, they had always a German SS next to her, a woman, with a dog, so if she didn't manage to bring discipline to us, and to hit us, and to make us do what she said, the Germans would beat her, and she wouldn't be a Kapo any more. For her, in order to survive, she had to be as nasty as the SS, and usually, a Polish or Czech girls who were there for many years, that's the only way they survived. Even today, when I hear of somebody that survived more than a year, I have my doubts, because, even to survive one year was, was very difficult.

How did the other prisoners feel about these Kapos?

Well, not always very good, because some Kapos were better than others, you know? I had the experience of two Kapos, which, when I looked at them, I said, "How can such sweet faces, such young girls, be so cruel to us?" They made us kneel in the winter, in Auschwitz, on our knees in bitter cold weather, I don't know for how many hours, you know, I don't know how many died and how many collapsed, and when I

returned to France, and I met a very lovely lady who was crying, her husband had been shot, she has lost all her family in Czechoslovakia, and she said, "But there are two nieces who survived." She takes a photo out, and there were these two girls, who were so horrible in the Camp, that made us suffer so much, and she said, and she cried and cried, this lady, and she said, "If you had known from what family they'd come, what lovely children they were." If you had to, if you wanted to survive, that was one of the games, but some were worse than others.

Did you tell her what they had been like as Kapos?

Yes, of course, of course I told her, and she, she, she could hardly believe it, but it was the circumstances. We weren't in Birkenau a week when they came round, because I was together, French, Belgian, and Dutch. A few came from North Africa, but this, our block was like that, these were the nationalities that were with us, because they were the convoys that arrived. Hungarians were somewhere else, Czechoslovakians somewhere else, Poles somewhere else.

And your sister-in-law to be, Janine, was with you already then?

With me, and her sister. And her sister. But what I wanted to tell you something else. One morning, it was early days, because Janine, I only got to know her when we were on the transport, but she right away liked my brother, she right away liked my brother! So they came round, and they said, "Who is either French, Dutch, Belgian", for three generations, or 300 years, you know, many generations, so Janine said, "We are already French 300 years", you know, she reckoned up. "I'm going to put my hand up." I said, "You know, if you put your hand up, I'm only French first generation, we will be separated, we have to make a choice here." You see, everybody thought you can have a better

time, perhaps, if you are a, perhaps pedigree like that. The trouble is that, many of them put their hands up, the ones that were actually French or whatever, the next thing we knew was, these poor girls came back and had the most terrible experiments done on them. Some, with everything hanging out in the middle, you know? Their organs.

Do you mean their abdomens had been cut open?

No, no, gynaecological experiments, terrible experiments. And the ones that hadn't died, were coming back to the Camp in terrible condition, and they didn't survive very long, many of them. They were taken for experiments. And so we lost a few more there, right away, in the beginning. So we soon knew what it was all about. And the girls that we were, I told you, when we were in the Commando Kanada, where we had the, all kinds of insults too, because, you know, they were, when we took our showers, the soldiers used to look at us, and then they used to throw buckets of water on us, we couldn't do anything, it was, for young girls, it was terrible, all that. But at least, when you came back, we used to get a piece of bread, and we used to get, sometimes, a piece of sausage and a bit of mustard with it, which means that our poor friends, that were working in the trenches, and came home half dead, we could give them a little bit of that sausage, can you imagine, how one slice, but it cheered them up a bit. What did we do when we had, let's say, half an hour to ourselves, and we were allowed to walk in the camps? We used to go and see what happened to the others, you see, to the other girls, what they'd done to them. They had to bring home, every day, three or four dead, you know, so they came home with three or four dead.

From the trenches?

Yeh.

And this is when you started smuggling clothing out?

Yeh. Yeh, but after, you know, after they had hung three girls in front of us, nobody smuggled any more.

Could you just tell that story quickly, so that we have it on the tape? About the clothing.

When we worked in the Commando Kanada* , we had the, we took a chance to bring back sometimes, either a pair of shoes, or a little bit of underwear or something for the girls who worked in the trenches, because by the time these girls came home from the trenches, their clothes were torn from the beating up, the shoes sometimes were stuck in the mud, and came back without soles, you know, whatever shoes they had on, and we thought that we could perhaps at least smuggle in

*The interviewee has subsequently explained that Commando Kanada was a shed where the clothes of the people who went into the crematorium were sorted into piles of dresses, spectacles etc. The clothes were then sent to Germany.

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a pair of shoes, taking their old shoes in the morning and coming back with another pair for them to wear the next day, so that they had at least something on their feet, orsometimes a bit of clothing to put on top, because they were freezing. But when we came home one day, and we were stopped at the entrance of the Camp, and the SS, there were at least, I think, two SS there, he said, he chose three girls, and we must've been 50, he said, "You, you and you, undress." And as they were undressing, unfortunately, the ones they had chosen, three of them, had some piece of clothing that they were bringing back, on top of the ones they were given to wear for themselves.

What, underneath the ones that they were ...

Yes. So the SS said he will give us a lesson for stealing and smuggling in clothing, which we were not allowed, and immediately, they had these, what do you call it?

Gallows.

They had these gallows everywhere there, they had gallows ready all the time, and the terrible part was that, they said, "And you are going to be there, and you are going to witness that." And we had to stand there, and we had to witness how these three friends of ours had been killed, and from that day onwards, we were not allowed to work there any more, and we were also put into a punishing group, and that was a time when we were terribly depressed from losing our friends, we were punished ourselves, having the SS around us with the dogs, having to dig trenches, and being beaten up and given no food, but I don't know if you want to hear the nice story now, or not?

Mmmm.

I end up with that nice story. Well, as you can imagine, that was a very very bad time, it was a time when you wondered, you know, was it such a good idea to have been chosen for work? You know, you wondered. That I often wondered, that I often wondered, all through Camps. I said, "Really and truly, the ones that were killed in the beginning, they didn't have to suffer like we have to suffer. And why should we have to suffer like this? Why should we have such frozen feet? Why should we have hunger? Why should we have such diarrhoea, and be so sick? Why should we go through that? Why should we fight it?" We often felt like giving up, but as I said, that experience is something that, such courage and such, such goodness that you can still find yourself in circumstances like that, it's very rare. There's the story of my little, when the Hungarians were coming, they were coming in such ... when they decided to take the Hungarian Jews, they were bringing them daily to Auschwitz, therefore the ovens couldn't cope with it, so they put one convoy in one of the blocks, and amongst these blocks were three little girls from Hungary, with whom we could speak, I think, because they spoke Yiddish, so we could make ourselves understood, so when we used to work in these trenches, and we were being punished and beaten up, and no food, these three girls were waiting somewhere in the Camp, and they said, "We have three rations, we are three sisters, but we would like you to have one ration for the two of you", and they did that for several days, while we were on that Commando, because after that we were again changed into another Commando, which also was very bad. And all through, after the Camps, and through my life, I always told the story, when I wanted to tell something about the Camps, I only told that story, I never told anybody anything terrible or sad, I always told that lovely story about these young girls, such lovely young girls, and I wondered if they came out alive. And how wonderful it was, to give up a ration of

bread, in those circumstances. But one day, when I came to the Reunion in Jerusalem.

That was two years ago?

That was in 1981, or '82 wasn't it?

I don't remember it very well.

36 years after, it must be six years ago already, because I have, 36 years we are now, how many years are we after the War?

43.

43, so,

So, seven years ago.

Seven years ago, '81, I think it was.

'81 in Jerusalem?

Yes, yes, Jerusalem. I was waiting in Plaza Hotel, to be taken to one of the celebrations or commemorations that were taking place in Jerusalem itself, and a young person came towards me, youngish let's say! She must have also been now, late, early 50s she must have been, or nearly 60, not quite, in her fifties, and she asked me questions, and she said, "Tell me, were you in Birkenau?" I said "Yes", and she said, "Were you in block 19?" I said, "I wouldn't know which Block I was, I was in so many blocks, having been in four Camps, I don't remember the number, but I have a tattoo, a number, you know, which is a French convoy", and I said, "Have you got a number?" And she said, "No." I said, "How come?" She said, "I never had a number." So I said to her, but you know, "I speak now English, and you

speaking American, what nationality are you?" She said, "I'm Hungarian." So I said to her, "Well, I was French at the time, and I live now in England." So I looked at her, and she was still very pretty, and her colourings reminded me of my Hungarian girl in the Camp, so I said to her, "Tell me, you got, by any chance, two other sisters?" And as they still had their hair at the time, I could tell them exactly the colour of their hair. And I also could tell them exactly what they did, you know, that one, they didn't do anything really, they didn't work, they were not allowed to work, because they were not meant to live anyway, so they only hid all the time, but one sister in particular, was very religious, she wouldn't work on Shabat, she wouldn't eat non-Kosher food, and she managed, I don't know how, to get a Siddur or a prayer book, and she was always hiding, and reading her prayers, and praying, and, and I wonder if these were the three sisters, and she said, "Yes", and of course, that was a very emotional reunion because I always was looking to meet them again. And then, of course, I wanted to know her story, how they escaped, and she told us that they never managed to get a number in Auschwitz, that they somehow were never working, they were just kept in the barracks, and eventually put on that long march that the people from Auschwitz did, before the Russians freed Auschwitz. And somehow these three girls escaped during that march, and ended up in a farm, they only realised once they were in a farm, that the maid said, "You know you have reached the house of the Chief of the Nazis here. I have to hide you if I want to save you." So she put them up, I think, not in their barn, but with some other people, in a barn. I suppose, by then, the Americans were very near, it was not a bad idea of her, to save her skin, so she saved them, that she put them up somewhere else, and that's how they were eventually freed and taken to a Camp, you know, where they all, where, after the Americans probably, it must have been April '45, they must have already liberated part of Germany there, and they were put in a Camp, and there she

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met an American Captain, whom she married later, and she now lives in New York, and has a lovely family, three children, I think six or seven grandchildren, and is very active ...

End of F140 Side B

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She's in New York. Yes, her name is Relly Geller, her married name, and she now gives a lot of interviews, about the Holocaust, she has been trying to write a book about it, she's at it for the last two or three years, and she's promised she'll have it finished some time! She visits her two sisters, the one that lives in Sao Paulo, and the one that lives somewhere in America, in another city, and I must say this, thank God, from a health point of view, she is very good, she is very well, and she is enjoying life, and it's always a pleasure when I can see her again, when I go to America, to visit my own daughter.

And you were about to start another story.

Oh yes! Oh yes, I must tell you about Regine, Regine Ansel was her name. Well she was 32 when we were 20, so she was 12 years our senior, and quite a girl. She was deported with her husband, her son was somehow saved, they didn't take the child, nor the mother, so the child and the mother remained in France, and she was deported to Auschwitz, in the same convoy as us, so she was together with us, and we became friendly. She somehow managed to get a job, to clean our block, to stay in the block and to make sure that everything was tidy. In each block, there was somehow a stove, a little stove, where they sometimes, they had a little container, you know, a little gamelle, to put water in. We were in the Commando Potato, the potatoes which had to be unloaded from a train, in wagons, put into these wooden, what would you call it, like the slaves used to work with these things, you know, it has wooden bars across like that.

A trough, like animals eat from?

Yes, but with handles, do you understand?

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Yes.

With handles.

Like a big wooden trough with handles?

No, no, no. It wasn't on wheels, we had to carry it, two persons, you know, one person in front and one at the back, and the SS were there, and we had to run with it, you know, so they used to fill them up, somebody used to fill them up, they used to weigh, I don't know how many kilos, and by then we were very weak already, and we never had anything to eat all day, so therefore we were especially weak, so we had to run. Of course, we could never run that fast, so one day, the SS that was standing there, he took his stick, his walking stick, and he, he threw it on the floor, on the ground, and it went, what would you call it?

Somersault?

It bounced up, and ended on my head. The stick made such a crack when it landed on my head, that my, Janine, thought it had cracked my skull. You know, from quite a distance he did it, because I wasn't going fast enough. Well, about that time I said I was more dead than alive, so at the end of the day, I pinched one potato, I said, "I'm taking one potato home", I think I had it anyway, so I took that one potato back, and I said "Regine, I'm more than half dead, you have to promise to make a little soup for us", you know, cut up the potato with a little water, for tomorrow night, when we come back from work, we have a little bit of potato soup. Well, the next day we had to work again, and all day, I was dreaming of a drop of potato soup. We arrive home again, more dead than alive, I said, "Regine, where is the soup?" Regine, in tears, she said, "I did put it on the stove, I did cook it, but somebody pinched it." I had to believe her, what could I do, I don't know if she ate it, or

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if it was pinched, we didn't believe anybody any more after that! But after the War, she came out, but her husband didn't survive. Every time she saw me, she said, "I owe you a soup. I owe you a potato soup. Come in, come, I give you a meal!" But unfortunately, we have lost touch, and I'm afraid she might not be alive any more, no, but she was a great girl.

Who, of your family, was still alive at this point, just the older brother?

What, in the Camp? The older brother and the second brother.

Yeh, two of the brothers.

Yeh, two of the brothers, who came back, they came back.

And they survived the War?

They survived, yes.

And your father was sent immediately to the,

Yes, yes,

To the crematorium?

Yes. My father thought it was a good idea to say that he had a weak heart, and it was the last thing to say, you see, but you didn't know. Who knew? Who knew? Who knew? Nobody knew. You didn't know where you were, you didn't know what was happening, it was a crazy world.

Had you ever heard of Auschwitz? Because it was pretty late in the War when you arrived there.

We knew about Camps, we knew about Dachau, but we didn't know that there was an extermination Camp, you know, with gas chambers, no. I suppose, like everybody else, you would have said, "You can't believe it. You can't believe it." The first reaction that I had when I arrived in Auschwitz was, if ever I come out, and I tell somebody what happened in Auschwitz, or Birkenau especially, and they don't believe me, I can understand. I said I would understand, because I am here myself, and I can't believe it, that these things can happen. And nobody is, planes were flying over Auschwitz, planes were flying over it, and we all said, "Why don't they bomb the Camps?" We would have lost our lives, you know, but it, we were, by now, every time, every week, there was a selection, do you understand? Every week, when you had been, went through delousing, you know, or the showers, Mengele would stand there with a few others, and select for the crematorium, "This one, this one, this one." The minute your bones were showing, that was the end. The minute you looked you are too thin, or too worn out, to do any work, that was the end. As I told you, I had always good colourings, and I had quite a, you know,

Full bust?

Full bust, so it took a long time till I got really so skinny you understand, so I had always something that I didn't look so skinny, so I passed. But the others, so many of our friends didn't. Because we knew, you had no choice. And then, I don't know, one woman said, on one of the trips in Israel, "I looked him in the eyes." I can assure you that when you pass Mengele, you didn't look him in the eyes, I can assure you, you couldn't pass quick enough, because, you knew if he points his finger, that was your death sentence, you had it. And that was a terrible part, and yet I, I met some lovely people, I don't know if any are alive, from Rumania, from Czechoslovakia, you know, some lovely, fine people. The cream of the French Jewry was

there, the cream, which should never have ended up in a Camp, I don't know, they had plenty of money to hide, and yet they were found, you see, and could not be saved. The bankers, the Levitan, the Lazarus, the best of the French were there, nobody came back, nobody came back, of these people. When you see one of the finest French family, the mother and daughter, lovely girl, 15, the mother, the cream, la creme de la creme, you know, so refined. And when I saw her one day, looking in a pile of rubbish to find a little bit of potato peelings to give to her daughter, it broke my heart, you know, to see a woman like that, and I said, I couldn't, I said, "If my mother had been alive I couldn't have, I couldn't have ..." It would have been a bit too hard to watch my mother doing things like that. Because I had always to try and make sense that my mother wasn't alive any more. You know, I tried, and I couldn't believe that my brother, I had always hope for my youngest brother.

For Marcel?

Marcel, yes, because maybe they didn't right away, take all the children, you know? And I always looked. When we went to the Potato Commando there, outside somewhere, to collect the potatoes, I saw a few children, about a dozen little children, I mean children from the age of 9, 10, 11, 12, who looked emaciated, terrible. I was wondering if perhaps my brother is amongst them, you don't give up, you know, you don't give up, he was young, and you, he never came back, no, he never came back. And from the, from what the 'Journal Officiel' now in France says, the list, he, he had no chance, they didn't give him a chance. So therefore, what? Yes, this is one of the little stories, of the potatoes. Unfortunately, she can't give me potato soup, I don't know where she is! Isn't that a nice story? But I'd always dreamt that I, for days, on this potato soup, and then we come back and she says, "I can't believe that somebody took it." You know, if you are hungry, starving,

you pinch, don't you. That's why we had to hide our bread if you don't want anybody to steal it, you know, some people didn't have such consciences, and they took it from you when they were hungry. Some of them didn't work, you see, so they didn't get anything. They hid in the toilets every day, because they knew if they would go out to work, they would come home dead, so they didn't go. I know, I have a friend in Strasbourg, I must say, Margot Gross, also a woman who was in her thirties, married, her husband and her came home, but if she is here today, my first reaction was, a million others should be here, because number one, to look at her she always looked like, thin, she was always thin, I think she must always have been a woman you could count the ribs, you know? And that was bad, and she is a professional lawyer, therefore she was more of an intellectual that didn't know how to hold a shovel. She was one of those hopeless cases. You know, there are some women, even if they are lawyers, they know how to hold something in their hands, but she is incapable, she's absolutely incapable. So the first reaction was, when I went to Strasbourg, and I saw her, I said, "Margot, if you are here, I know so many young girls that should be here. How did you do it?" After we left. Because while we were in Birkenau, she lived on our rations, you see, she would never go to work, she said, "They will, they will bring me home dead, you know, they will kill me." So she went to the Appel, the counting, and she somehow managed to escape before the convoy left for work, and she hid in the toilets, but they sometimes patrolled the toilets too. She managed to be in the toilets, and eventually, I cannot remember, she must have been once, digging trenches and that was the end, you know, she could see she couldn't do it, they would kill her, she wouldn't do it. So she remained hidden in the toilets forever. Eventually, we left, we left in October, so she remained in Auschwitz, cos she was always hiding in the toilets, you see. And she was apparently in a hospital, doing the "Revier" it was called, because she was

sick, and she got very friendly with the nurse that was looking after the sick there, and by then, there was hardly anything left of her. She was already numbered to go on the truck to go to the crematorium, when the nurse changed her for somebody else, to make the numbers up, and that's how she is alive today. And when she came home, somebody else went. She found her husband and came home and they had a child, she is a lovely healthy girl, I must say, and she, she's not too bad at all, she's now a woman, I think, of 70, and she looks not too bad, she had frozen feet, they amputated a few toes, but she looks quite well, and her daughter, she lost her husband since, but he was a very good man, very nice to her, and she has a lovely daughter who takes good care of her mother. The daughter is now married, with children, quite comfortable, and she has a pleasant way of life, you know, to end her days, very pleasant, but she is one of those survivors that are only here because another one went in her place.

Do you think that troubles her?

I don't think so. I'll tell you why. Probably the other person had no chance to live. Do you understand? She would've been in the next one. It wasn't like you have taken a healthy person, do you understand? They have taken another corpse, that wasn't dead today, but it would be tomorrow. But sometimes it might come to her mind, you know that, no, I think she, she didn't, she didn't look, although she thought that, because once we were in the Revier, in hospital, and we were, people were very ill, you know, with typhus, undernourished, and exhaustion, and so many went mad, so many went mad, I don't know if the people realised, so many people went mad. Lovely people. Lost them, went mad, I saw them, they went mad. Couldn't take it. Do you know, when the Hungarians came, people who had not suffered at all like the Polish Jews, you know, the ghettos, the Hungarians when they arrived, coming from

Budapest or wherever they came, good looking people, you know, people who lived nicely, they died like flies, they couldn't take it, I couldn't believe it, today they were alive, tomorrow they were dead. That was happening. They just couldn't take it, they just died, they wanted to die, they didn't want to live, you know, they just gave up. They right away gave up, they didn't wait, they couldn't take that, the whole thing, they just let themselves go, and they went. Unfortunately, one was so often at death's door that, as I said, that often I cannot cry often, when it's very very sad, something, and I cry over a silly film, you understand? But something really tragic, I cannot cry any more, it reminds me of all the other atrocities, it kills me, you know, inside. Because I've seen so many of these young people, anybody, you know, people, and the image I always see in front of my eyes, when I think of Birkenau, I see a child walking across the Camp, a beautiful little boy, with a bunch of red hair, which they must have kept for a while, and killed after, you know, they sort of, there was a beautiful little child. Because no child remained alive. And that's, because I remember looking out of the little window of my barracks and seeing that lovely little child going across there. And when I think of it, when I think of the Germans, I only think of this child, you know? This child is one of the millions they have killed, representing for me the millions they killed. That lovely little boy that just walked across. I cannot, I will never, in my lifetime, forgive them, no. Never. And I will never forget, not me. And I'm probably, there are many others like me that cannot get over that, no, what they did. The atrocities, and this child I remember, such a lovely, a little beauty. Because we had seen a child for now, a few months, we never saw birds, we never saw trees, I said, "Even the birds don't sing here. There are no birds, nothing." You don't know what it means when you are deprived of all that. You never see anything green any more, you don't see any birds, you don't see any flowers,

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you don't see anything, except mud, death and misery, and you are young, and you are entitled to have a life, you know, you want to live, and here you are in the midst of all this, so sometimes it's quite amazing that I can still smile. I had a letter, by that time I was nearly dead. I had a letter from a gentleman in Theresienstadt. I always wanted to find him, and I could never find him again. We were liberated only 9th May, '45, from Theresienstadt, now that was the fourth convoy I was in. We were 500 girls, and we were carrying, as I said, at one stage, 125 dead, we had with us, and I tried to escape. We arrive in Theresienstadt, I was, I weighed, I think, 35 kilos by then, only, like a skeleton, very very ill, and Janine and all everybody very very ill. First thing, a medical. We were put in schools, Theresienstadt was more like a little town, so we were put in a, in a kind of house, which had still the bunks, you know, where people slept, so we were together with the French and the Belgians in one building, and as they opened the train, the wagons, there were some people from Theresienstadt, looking to see us coming out of the train, and they looked very civilised, these Jewish people, they were people who were a bit protected, they were taken only recently, they were mostly from Czechoslovakia, and there was one gentleman, a Mr. Katz, who took on the responsibility to look after a few of us, so he went where we were sleeping, and I had pneumonia, and I was so ill, I was delirious, and that was a time when it was soon being liberated, you see, the doctors, everybody was trying to run away again, so he went and found a Jewish doctor, and he found some Panadol, some aspirin, something, and they put a blanket, which they soaked in ice cold water, and they wrapped me in this blanket all night, they changed the blanket when it was getting hot, and made it cold again. I said "This time you are killing me off, this time you are killing me, you are finishing me", I said, "Now you're killing me. I've survived up till now, and now you're killing me." You know, I was in a terrible state, and

eventually, the temperature fell, and then they brought me some food I couldn't eat, you know, food, and so I said to Janine, "I cannot eat any longer in these containers. I want a china plate. I want to eat in a china plate." She said, "Where do you want me to get a china plate here? There are no china plates." And she cried and cried, and said, "You must eat", you know, and I couldn't eat, I wouldn't eat, I couldn't eat, I couldn't eat. I just fancied to be different. But anyway, and the letter from [incomprehensible words] Mr. Katz, they said, unfortunately it's in German, I don't know if you read German?

No, I don't.

He could only speak German, so he says, "Freda, that can even smile when she has over 40, you know, 40",

Temperature.

Temperature, yes. And he wrote for quite a while, and then, from Czechoslovakia. And then there was no more news, and when I got engaged to my husband here, in London, I asked him, "I hear he might have gone to Israel, you know. Can you do some searches and find him for me, because, you know, he saved my life there." Afterwards, the Russians came in, you know, we were expecting the Americans, and the Russians came in, we were a bit disappointed, and the Russians came in, and they bought order to Theresienstadt. There was typhus, you know, raging in Theresienstadt. The Russians came in, everybody was sorted out, the ones that were very sick were taken to hospital, but I had, by now, you know, that one track mind, that they will take me again away, you know, I will only, they will again take me somewhere else. And the Russians, I was supposed to go to a hospital, the way I was ill, but I wouldn't, I said, "You know, Janine, they will again separate us, you know, you will be somewhere else, and I will be somewhere else." We

didn't want to be separated. So all the sick ones went into a hospital, and they put wire, wire all round.

Barbed wire?

Barbed wire all around the hospital, because there was lots of typhus, and the others that could stand on their feet, they gave flour, a bit of potatoes, a bit of sugar, I don't know what, and with the stove we should start making ourselves our own food. So I met, the tanks were coming in from Russia, and there was a very handsome young man there, an officer, he said he is Jewish, and he spoke French, and he told us what happened to the Jews of Kiev, that's another story, too horrible for words. And then he told us that there was a lot of anti-Semitism in the Russian Army, but, he said, he will try to bring us some eggs tonight. He's still coming! Because I'm sure he couldn't.

Unfortunately, they have, in the Russian Army, all kinds of people, you know, Mongolians, uneducated, I don't know from which part of the country, and they used to get drunk. So the first night that they occupied Thereisenstadt, or liberated, rather, this time, Theresiendstadt, some of the soldiers went into our school, and on the ground floor, were the Dutch and they raped a few, probably not only in our school, we were a floor higher, but they raped a few girls, as bad as they looked, and in other places too. So they imposed a curfew, nobody was allowed out after, the soldiers, after a certain hour. And they did a marvellous job of, with the sick. We went to see one or two of our friends which were in the Sick Bay, there in the hospital, they let us in eventually, we couldn't get over it. They were lying in beds with sheets, white sheets, they were getting white bread, they were getting cottage cheese, the Russians used to there and feed them with it, by the spoonful. They were taking care of them very well. They were doing very well, the ones that had, were in hospital, you know. They had labs working day and night to get the

people better. Day and night the hospital, and the laboratory where we were working, to get the people on their feet. Then eventually, when, after a few weeks, May and June, we were already back, probably another 10, 12 days. There was an arrangement with the Americans. The Americans came back to take us to another Camp near Pilsen, Pilsen, and they gave us some kind of clothing, everything was too big, you know, it was all hanging on us, and they took us to Pilsen, and we all thought they were the golden boys and they put us again in barracks, you know, where ... and when the food arrived, it was the same black bread as in Auschwitz, like cement, which we couldn't eat because we had still diarrhoea, and we saw an enclosure for the Germans ...

End of F141 Side A

F141 Side B

This is the second interview with Freda Wineman, 29th November, 1988.

I would like to speak a little more about my background, especially about my life in Lorraine, I think I will give you some more details. I remember from, that we lived in Metz, as a child, as a small child, and all what I remember really is that we lived in an apartment, which seemed very big, as a child, and I used to go, I think for convenience sake, I went to a Convent, although my parents were very religious, and when my father realised that I prayed very well, as a Catholic, he immediately took me away from that school, and sent me to another school. And my father, if I like to go back to my father, he was born in Lodz, but was sent to Vilna to the Yeshiva. I think he was supposed to become a Rabbi, he had smichus at a very young age, and spoke fluent Ivrit. I don't know at what age he came to Frankfurt-am-Main, but I suppose, as a religious man, but by that time without payess, or without anything, very fresh and modern clothes, and rather elegant. He came to Frankfurt-am-Main, maybe in search of a bride, and met, I don't know if it was by introduction or what, my mother, who also came from a religious background. I think my grandparents were very religious, the mother wore still a Sheitel, unfortunately, from what I've heard from my mother, they died young, and within six months, when my mother was 21, I think my mother was just married a few months when one parent died, and six months later, the other parent died. My older brother was born still in Frankfurt-am-Main, and I think that was the time of the big inflation in Germany, and I remember my mother telling me that for that little cot that my brother slept in, they paid 1 million Marks, as a child it was very impressive. The only thing that I do remember from Frankfurt-am-Main, because we were taken to

Frankfurt-am-Main, when I was eight years old, to go back, I must have been, this must have been 1931. My mother wanted to settle a few things in Frankfurt, she also went to her parents' graves, and we stayed there for a few weeks, therefore, we were with friends. I was going to school, to a Jewish school, I, I wasn't very happy because I had to write in German, and I couldn't, and I made big blotches on my exercise book, and for that, I got hit on my fingers, and I didn't like that at all, I hated it. I hated it for many reasons. I hated it, because when I came out of school, already in those days, the German children used to hit us, and call us "Dirty Jews", because this was a Jewish school. And I didn't like the school meals, because they gave us those big Frankfurters with baked beans, I didn't like it a bit, and the nice thing that I remember from Frankfurt was that you could go ice skating, it was a cold winter. And it was Chanukka and in that street, there must have been mostly Jewish families, because all the Chanukkiot were lit in the window. And the family we stayed with was extremely religious, and we had to wait till Shabbath was out to put on the light. We could have daylight, but no electric light. I used to look out the window, and I could see already, even in those days, the German Brownshirts, on horses, going through the streets, you know, with their Nazi

Armbands?

Armbands, and they used to frighten you when you ran. And I was very happy when my mother decided now it is time to go back to France, and we couldn't get out quick enough. I didn't like anything about it, except that, you know, the atmosphere, I didn't like in Germany, already in those days, also I was very little, and I was very happy when we went back to, not to Metz, but to Sarreguemines, they changed towns, because they decided that it was not for them, they went to Sarreguemines, and there we had an apartment, and my father was always more or less in the same business, he

dealt in clocks and watches, and medium priced jewellery, and he was known as "M. Silberberg l'horloger". We arrived in Sarreguemines, we were sent to the Lycee Francais, not to the State School. My father was a great believer in a good education for his children, he didn't mind paying, although times were difficult for everybody in those days, it was the 1930s. He sent us to a good school, I remember, I soon managed to, that was a mixed school, boys and girls, I managed very quickly to be very, I was brought up with three brothers, so I right away managed to break my wrist, and my father thought that I was too much of a tomboy, that it was no good to leave me in a boys' school, and I was quickly taken out of the Lycee, and put in the next school, which was called Ecole Superieure pour Jeunes Filles, only girls school, and I was not very happy, because I liked it in the other school, but I suppose, I mean, it was also a very good school, fee-paying school, it was very hard when you had to buy books, everything was paid in France, you had to pay for the books and exercise books, fees to the school, and so on and so forth. But that's how, and we continued, I had many friends, and I think that to frequent, to be on the Shabbat, you know, on a day which, we were not even free, we had to go to school on Shabbat, but when we mixed outside school, it was mostly with our Jewish friends. There were two kinds of Jews in Alsace Lorraine, the ones that were like my sister-in-law, born in Alsace, of older stock for several, several generations, and people like my parents who came originally from Germany or Poland, and they were somehow kept apart. Like, a little bit like secondary citizens. But I must say, that even through the 30s, when people were migrating from Poland, and came through Lorraine to go on to wherever, America, or anywhere else, that they needed money to go on, it was usually the Jews that came themselves from Poland who looked after these people, that got them out of prisons, and cared for them. And the Synagogue in Sarreguemines, although it was a relation of my mother who was the Rabbi there, the Chazan, had an organ, and therefore

wasn't good enough for my father, and some other people, you know, in the community, so they had their own Shtiebl, and that's where they prayed on Friday night, and Shabbat, and we, the girls, some of us, we had a duty that we had to prepare Kiddush for every Shabbat, you know, herrings and whatever went with it, for all the people after the davening, and it was the same for the holidays, the High Holidays, we wouldn't go to, to the Synagogue, but they hired a hall where the ladies sat separate and the men davened, and because the community was not religious enough for the people that came actually from Poland, had different nigunim and they, the whole way of life, they were more particular what they ate, and everything, it was, although the Juifs Lorrains and the Juifs Alsaciens is also very religious, they keep it, they haven't got always the same background, they haven't been educated in the Yeshiva, you know, they haven't got that background, but they keep the traditions, and they keep the kosher house and so on and so forth. And for a Jewish education I can always remember that we had either somebody coming to the house to teach us, and once a week we had, in French school, the religion is, was taught in school, the Rabbi used to come, the Reverend from the Protestant Church, and the Curé from the Catholic Church. Once a week, for one hour, they taught religion. We had an old Rabbi, he was called Rabbi Dreyfus, and he was terribly obliging, especially when we were already in the highest classes, because the next class we had a difficult subject, it depends what it was, some did Latin, some Greek, and some French, not French, but Geography, we had lessons afterwards, which we hadn't prepared properly, so we said, "Mr. Rabbi, could we just finish our work? You know, we are really late with our work, we haven't prepared ourselves, could we just finish that in the meantime?" So we learnt very little in our religious classes, religion classes, and my father could see that. He saw that we didn't learn anything, so he used to ask somebody to come and teach us, at least a little. The girls weren't taken so seriously in

those days, you know, but the boys were, and my father had a terrible fight with his own sons, because he insisted that before they go out on Shabbat afternoon, they had first to do some Chumash, they had to sit and learn. He didn't want them to grow up like the boys in the town, that didn't know much. No, he wanted them to learn a bit more. Well, that was, that was before the War. My father continued, even during the War, when we were evacuated, to be religious. He always davened, he always laid tefillin, he wore tzitzis, but he was a modern man otherwise. His children wore tzitzis, my brothers never went out, they were never around without anything, without their head covered. He wanted them to be religious. Once we were evacuated, just to go back with religion, once we were in St. Etienne, my father continued to go to Shul, at his risk, because the Germans were there, and you could have been arrested any time. But he believed that when he went to Shul, you know, with his Tallis that he would be all right, you know, he didn't take any notice. He went to Auschwitz with his Tallis, and all his prayer things, he was a believer, and he continued to be a believer until the end. I understand that his family in Poland, my father was in contact with his family in Poland, and we had letters regularly, and we had photos from the family, but we didn't know them. And my father always said, "We can't have photos from my grandfather, because he wouldn't let himself be photographed." We understood that he was an accountant, and my father came from a background where his mother died when he was young, leaving six children, that's why we are all called Dvora, there are many Dvora's in the family, and grandmother died at the age of 36, leaving six children. My grandfather was a very young man, he married a second time, and he had another daughter, who, as I understood, became a dentist, but didn't survive either. That is as much as we remember being taught of our family, in Poland, except one aunt, who eventually went through France, and, because she needed treatment in Switzerland, and eventually

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settled in Israel. She died last year at the age of 83. She was the only survivor, and from her, I heard many things which, in those days, I wasn't interested. I also happened to hear a lot about a family in Poland, through my mother-in-law, who, by sheer coincidence, was also related somehow. I don't know how many generations back, but she knew my background better than I did, and she used to tell me that she lived next door to my great grandparents' house, and it was my great grandmother who taught her how to embroider. Because once the mother died, my father's mother died, they were brought up by the grandparents. From what I understand, they were not poor people, they had, I don't know what's called not poor people in Poland, but they had houses, you know, and so they, I have never been in Poland, there was a kind of courtyard, and all these houses belonged to them, and therefore my mother-in-law lived in one of those houses too. Just as far as I was told that, and my father was always very pleased to say that my grandmomther was a terrific cook and baker, you know, and that she did such wonderful things, but otherwise, as children, unfortunately, when you live in France, and in those days, now, when I look back, I can see how silly we were, we wanted to become not assimilated, but to have French ways, to behave exactly like French people, you know, speak, behave, do everything like people who were born in France, educated in France, so we wanted to be like everybody else, but really and truly, the people that remain to this day, friendly, are the people that come from the same background. We, even today, have more in common than before. It always, it remains the same.

What language did your parents speak with you?

Well, my parents, you see, although my father came from Poland, my mother spoke German, and therefore, my mother spoke German to us, and we spoke sometimes French to her, or we spoke German to her. We spoke a perfect German, till we

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arrived in Sarreguemines. When we went to the school in Sarreguemines, and they speak a certain patois, like Lorrain, they made fun of us, because we spoke Hoch Deutsch, and they thought it was very affected, and we soon had to learn the patois Lorrain, which today, I cannot speak any more. No. And my mother always wrote in German, and they didn't speak Yiddish amongst themselves, my parents, either. My father used his Yiddish if, when he met people who came from Poland, he used his Yiddish, therefore my Yiddish that I know today, is the Yiddish that I had quickly to learn in the Camps, so that I could speak to other people, in common, you see, because there were so many nationalities, with so many different languages, but one language we could make ourselves understood, was a little bit of Yiddish, if you could make yourself understood like that. So what I know, which is not a good Yiddish, because it's a very German Yiddish when I speak it, but I understand everything now in Yiddish, because I know it better. I don't know what I can tell you still. I was very, I think I had a, I was happy in school. I was happy the way we lived, I think, because when we went to St. Etienne, and I had nightmares, I longed to see my friends, you know, I was uprooted, I missed them. I missed my school life because I was uprooted, I missed seeing the people I used to know. I felt very unhappy, because now it was hard times, it was fear, it was, it was everything was hunger, it was an unhappy time, and therefore I dreamt always of my days at home, because there was always food on the table, there was, although it was hard times, there was always food, there was always the books, there were always the friends, you know, we were trying our best in school, you know, because my father was terribly strict, God forbid if we came home with bad Reports, it was terrible! So you had to work, because he did, he made a big sacrifice by sending us all to good schools, a good school, and he himself took always the trouble to see that all our books looked lovely, you know, well covered and everything, in good condition, there was nothing short. But at a

sacrifice. It meant that he very well send, at the age of 11, you could send a child working already. You could think they're living before the Industrial Revolution, but it was still like that in 1930s in France. You could take your child out at the age of 11 of school, finished. But he insisted that his children continued.

Your mother didn't work outside of the home at all?

No, no. My mother had enough with four children to look after, and she was a very good mother, and I was also very attached to my mother. Being the only daughter I was probably a little bit, I won't say terribly spoilt, but I was the only daughter, and I had a very good relationship with my mother, and sometimes when I hear of parents, you know, daughters that haven't got a good relationship with their mother, and sometimes with my own daughter, I cannot understand that the relationship is not like I had with my mother, but then they remind me that I was only a child, perhaps if I would have been an adult, a full adult, and have gone through all the emotions that one goes through when you get married, and one thing and another, maybe it wouldn't have been the same, but for me, that was the relationship I had. And therefore, I never quite got over it, because I looked up to my mother, you know, and I was so attached, and she was very attached to me, there was a very beautiful relationship, and I really, for years and years, I cried, you know. When I had children myself, you understand, I only wanted my mother. When I got married, I wanted my mother. And I thought it was terrible not to have your mother at your side, but I don't know, some people are not so, I don't know if it is because it is the way we were separated that I longed for her so much. Maybe that's the reason. Even to this day, you know, I find, I always need an acquaintance that is somehow the age of, it's younger now these days, of my mother, to be friendly with, because there is still an emptiness. I always have one friend which is a

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mother figure, that I can count on, or talk to. That's probably something that is left. You cannot get rid of that. You cannot get rid of that. When you have been separated, uprooted, you know, the way they have been killed, you cannot get over it, ever. So, I think I ...

What was your mother's maiden name?

Yes, my mother's maiden name was Mingelgran. And my uncle Mingelgran in America became Green.

How?

He Americanised it.

I wanted to ask about her family, did any of them survive?

My, no, no, what happened, unfortunately, with my mother's family, was very tragic. She had one brother in Italy, and she had one brother who escaped Germany, I will just say a little bit about this uncle, because he passed through France on his way to Manila, because he left very late. He was married to a woman from Stuttgart, and she couldn't have children for many years, and in 1938, at a very bad time, she was pregnant, and she gave birth to a child after 8 months, the wife, she died, and the child died, but he was never sure that they really died, you see. He had already doubts that they both died, and all what I can remember as a young child, was that, a young child, I must have been 12, 13, I don't know how old I was, he passed through France, on his way to Manila, where he had papers, he had been hidden a few weeks in Stuttgart, and he was crying all the time because he had lost his wife and his child.

You mean they never left hospital?

No. No.

And he was just informed that they had both died in childbirth?

Yes, yes. And he, he cried and cried and cried, and then he left for Manila. And then we were still in correspondence with him during the War, the beginning of the War, where he said it was very hot in Manila, but he was, things were not that good, but anyway, he was at least in Manila. Then everything went quiet. After the War, we, my brother David, wrote to the Rabbi of Manila, and asked him if he knew what happened to my uncle. He somehow got to know that my uncle had been taken by the Japanese into a Camp. The treatment wasn't that much better than with the Germans. He came out weighing 40 kilos, and ended up, the next letter we got, that was through this Rabbi, that he was now in San Francisco. And from there he wrote a letter, it was like he had seen Paradise, he loved San Francisco. He met a lady, also from Germany, that was during the War in Shanghai, he married, and he had another so many good years, happy years with this lady, who only died last year, or the year before. She kept in touch with us all the time, because she was so happy with my uncle. I always wanted to see this uncle, because he was the last link, and I had small children, and I had nobody, and I wasn't in the financial position to go at the time, and by the time I could do it, in 1972, he had just died the year before. And I came to San Francisco, looking for something that still had a link with my mother, but of course, this good lady had only her love for my uncle, she didn't know that I was looking for a link with my mother, and that was the last, it was like, it was real, it was the last cut, you know, of the apron string, that was the last. It was such a blow to me, in the meantime, at the same time. It was like, that's it. You must get it out of your system, that there is nothing left, you know. There is no more. But I was always looking for that, that wasn't there. You know, when I arrived there, the biggest disappointment of my life, you know.

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You didn't know he had died?

Yes. But even, I was looking for somebody, I was still looking for something that didn't exist really, but I was looking. But when I spoke to my aunt, this aunt, it was his second wife, she was very pleased to see somebody who was a relation of her husband, because she loved her husband, but I was looking for something that didn't exist any more. It was very lucky that I was with people on that tour, from Switzerland, with whom I'm still friendly. They could see what happened to me, it was such a shock, you know, I suffered from it, but it gave me, like having suddenly an ice cold shower, you know, something you have to come to terms with it now. And it's difficult to explain what this means now. Then there was another uncle who lived in Milan, married with a daughter. He, unfortunately, he never became an Italian citizen, therefore he was also interned.

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...was interned in Italy.

He was interned in Italy, and he died in, he died in the Camps there, I don't know, in Italy itself. His wife went to America, and from what I understand, married a Czechoslovakian refugee. I never saw her. The daughter is married, somewhere in America. I am not in touch with her, I don't think she has, as she didn't know us very well, she never kept in touch, it hasn't been because you are actually related, we had no strong ties with this uncle, although he wrote to my mother before the War, but with the one who went to Manila, we had stronger ties. If you like to know the names, the names of my parents, the original names were, my father, before he changed his name was Silberberg, but written, I think, originally, Zylberberg. His name was Israel Shloime. And my mother was Mingelgrun, Sarah, but when they came to France, they changed their name to Silberberg. My father became Paul, to make things easier, and my mother became Rose. In the, everybody that arrived in Auschwitz was automatically called Sarah, she came back to her name, Sarah.

Why was everyone called Sarah?

They put everybody down as Sarah.

All the women?

Whatever name you had.

Like in a convert,

Yes, it became Sarah.

And did the men all,

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This, I wouldn't know about that. Yes, I think that's to recall a little bit, the background of my parents, and their families. There is a survivor of my, from my father's side, who is the son of one of his brothers, who remained in Germany, you mustn't forget that the people who live in Poland before, and went through all the ghettos and Camps, by the time the War was finished, they had nowhere to go. To go back to Poland was no good, Germany was also the last place, but somehow with the occupation of the troops there, they found ways and means, at least, of making some kind of money to survive, to barter, I don't know, and therefore, with the idea of eventually ending up in Israel, but we are now in 1988, he's still living in Germany, and he married at the time, a person who became Jewish, a German woman, who looked after him when he came out of the Camp.

This is one of your father's brothers?

Yes, yes. And he had a son, who has lived in Israel for a while, on a kibbutz first, with a cousin of ours, studied a few years at the Hebrew University and returned eventually, couldn't do well in Israel, returned to Germany, and is married to a Jewish/English girl, from London, who is now living also in Germany, I think in Munchen. They all live there with the hope that they will one day go back to Israel, but at the moment they're still all living in Germany, and I think there is quite a community in Berlin, and there's another one in Munchen. I'm very sad about it, because, but on the other hand, I can understand nobody really wanted these people. They could have come to Israel of course, but you must understand, when they have been, as youngsters from the age of 12, you know, roughing it in Poland, that they wanted to make, probably, quick money, and have an easier life, and therefore, I don't blame him, the only thing I say is that every time I've seen him, on different occasions, I said, "You must leave Germany by now, you know, you have now made enough money to have invested

plenty in Germany, in Israel, not Germany, in Israel, so that they will end up their lives in Israel, but at the moment, they're still living in Germany, and I'm not very proud of it, I must say, I'm not proud at all. I really regret it. So we are, lately because I regret it so much, he's even ashamed to write any more! Because if he comes in to see me, I only say, "Why are you still in Germany? Why don't you get out? What's the matter, now you don't need to be in Germany any more."

Are his parents alive?

No, his, his father died in an epidemic, my father lost two brothers in the thirties, through an epidemic of diptheria in Poland.

In an epidemic?

Yes.

But I thought this was the brother who survived the War?

No, this is the cousin, the first cousin, this is the son of that brother. Now, a generation back, my father's relations.

None of your father's brothers survived the War.

Nobody, nobody.

This was a son who survived the War?

Yes. The only one. The only one. Two brothers died, so there must have been one other, I don't know, but nobody survived otherwise. It was some time before the War. His mother didn't survive either, and his mother, I can't remember now the name, his mother is the relation, his uncle

really, is the one, the aero... (??) the plane manufacturer, that has a factory in Israel, I forget the name now, but he has, I forgot the name of the family, they have a factory in Israel, not the one that is the,

I know which one you mean, yes.

Yes, yes, that's his uncle. He lived in France, he had a factory in France, and he has one in Israel. He is in touch with this relation of his. That's the only survivor, really, on that side. And then the children of my aunt, who live in Israel, they are since 1933 in Israel, but from Europe, there is nobody left, nobody. I must say, that as a child, I missed the idea that we didn't have any relations in France. The people that came from Poland and Germany and settled in France, they were again, newcomers, you know, that had to resettle in a new country. I think that's as much as I can tell you. Is that enough?

Yes, lovely, fine. Was there any anti-Semitism in Lorraine when you were growing up?

In Lorraine, as children, as children. I think because, in, I didn't feel it in those days, because of the, the class, you know, the non-Jewish friends we had as children, we didn't feel that there was anti-Semitism in the school itself, you know, we didn't feel that. We felt, when we were more aware of it afterwards, when we went into the centre of France, you understand, when we moved to, it was Wartime, you know, everybody was in the same boat, that you, you didn't have any time, I didn't feel it then either, because really and truly, the Company, I worked for a few months in this Company there, in Blâmont, my mother said, "You have to do something." So it was very nice, because I was terribly shy, and I was put with a Director, who was a polio victim, who had his office across the main office, and I had, he wanted to get at me, out of this shyness, and he

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said you have to, you know, I had to do everything myself, you know, I had to write letters, I had to pay out, I had to do all these things, and they paid me very well. My mother said they paid me too much, not because, I was still a schoolgirl, and they were very pleased, and probably I would have done very well, I liked the gentleman, he was very kind to me, he said, "You have to order this, you have to pay this, you have to write this letter", and he left it to me, you know, so you had to use your own initiative, and I thought that was very nice. But unfortunately, I only worked for a few months, because then there was a "debacle", it was called "la debacle".

That was when you,

That was when we had that debacle, when everybody left.

That's what it was called in French?

Yes, la debacle. Everybody then ran away again. So what happened in Blâmont, I think I spoke already about it, is that we lived there, from, we arrived there in, before the War started, before 3rd September, and we left the following June, that was '39, and we left on the debacle road, when everybody was on the road, in 1940, June 1940. During the winter of, of 1939/40, it was one of the coldest winters in France, and the French Army was retreating. It was a pitiful sight, and the, and I worked, and my brother, what did he do? He tried to finish his Baccalaureate through correspondence, and he gave a few lessons to the girl, to the daughter of the Director of that Company, they were called Kahn and Weil, and as it happened, unfortunately, that same girl happened to be afterwards in the Camps with us. And I always mix up, I think if she is not Simone Weil, do you understand, there was a Simone Weil with us, who was the girl who got the lessons from my brother, taught

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by my brother at the time, and I think she called herself by her maiden name, Simone Weil, the one in France.

And have you ever tried to contact her?

Yes, I met her recently at a big Conference, and I said, because, the other person who is friendly with me, Marceline Rosenberg, from Paris, says that she is the Simone Weil that was with us. You see, we were several French girls together, and Simone Weil was with us in Bergen Belsen, and the convoy from France, from May and June, were together. May and June, because they only let 50 girls in, and every barrack must have taken, I don't know, a couple of hundred, so there were 50 from France, 50 from Belgium, 50, we had some Dutch, and we had a few from North Africa, and we had also a few already at the time, from Greece, also, they were already arriving. So I only know that Simone Weil was with us in Bergen Belsen, before that I cannot remember her. Because as I said, the Commandoes were different, you know, we were, in the morning you were told to go that way, or that way, or that way, so I can't remember.

But she might remember your brother if he was her teacher?

Yes. But I told her now, at this conference here in London, I said, "You know, I spoke to Marceline", which she knows very well, she's in contact with her, "and she said that we must have been together. My name is Freda." She says, "I remember a Freda, that must have been you", because there were not many Fredas. You know, when you live, you had one or two or three that you were very, clung together, I won't say friendly, you clung together, if one was hungry or sick, you know, then you helped her, you know, you couldn't help the whole world, you kept together, two or three or four of you, you know, you kept together, and you talked to the others too, but we were nearly always the same, trying to survive, and I was very pleased to see how

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far she got. I mean, she had, she was, in a way, lucky, that when she came home, she had relations who helped her to continue to study, and to, she must have been brilliant anyway, you know, so she

You actually never went to school again after you left Sarreguemines?

No.

That was the end of your education?.

Yes, yes.

And you were 16?

Yes, not even, 15\, not sixteen. That's when it stopped, you see, and then the War started, and my brother was before Matriculation then, my father let him finish. When my younger brother was still young, and they both had to go to school, you know, and he just couldn't support everybody in school any more, my father, so he said, you, being from a religious background, he said, "You are going to do some work, and probably marry, you know, in a few years time, and there's this", ... but I wasn't even, I was, of course, I was unhappy because everything had stopped, you know, everything had stopped. And I lost all my friends, and all my, the whole, what you need as a young person, you know, to keep together. But unfortunately my brother was the same, he met, he didn't meet him, but we heard after the War, that his best friends were in the Resistance, and had been captured, and tortured, and they were killed, you know, so they didn't survive either.

These were Jewish friends?

Yes, yes, yes. Some very fine young men, clever young men, very nice, also didn't survive. And then when I went back recently to Sarreguemines we went to the Synagogue, where they have a very big plaque for all the people who were deported from Sarreguemines, and I was sorry to see that some of my friends, you know, that I was in class with, were also deported, also didn't survive, you know, some nice girls, Jewish girls. Really, most of the people that had a meaning in our youth, you know, haven't survived, except one that unfortunately died this summer, and I was very heartbroken. She had survived without being deported, her sister was deported, and she died aged 62, this summer, something. She was the one of them that had survived from the times of our, when we lived in, in Sarreguemines, you understand? And whose parents had the same background as my parents, and who prayed in the same places, and whom we visited every Shabbat, because it was about the same background, you know, religious enough! But she's also now no more. So you can see it's so I don't know where you want to continue from there. We went back to Alsace Lorraine. We are now in St. Etienne. In St. Etienne.

You said your father couldn't afford to keep you all at school in Blâmont, and St. Etienne.

No.

But he did some sort of work in these places?

Yes, what my father could do in the circumstances, he managed to buy a few more watches, you know, somehow, to get some watches, and to sell some watches, you know, just like that, to, he tried to do some kind of work, you know, some kind of business, to get from the manufacturer, it was difficult to get goods too, you know, to get some clocks or watches, or some little things, and resell them, so that he could continue at least to supply some of the money, and

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then I got some little wages, you know, they were paid very badly in that Les Acienēs de la Marine, they paid very badly, and I wasn't happy, because with this other Company I was happy, because I worked for one person, whilst here was in a kind of office.

That was the steel factory?

Yes. I was in the office, and everybody, the girls were very nice, not Jewish girls, they were all non-Jewish, and unfortunately, I, we could have perhaps all been saved, there was something which went totally wrong. I once, when I entered this office, there was an old Director, he must have been in the seventies, and there was a lady Director, she was, I think, his girlfriend, and there was other people in the office, and then he was, at one time, a Mayor of a little town next to St. Etienne, and he had all the stamps, you know,

The rubber stamps?

Rubber stamps in his office. Came a young Director who took over, and that was 1943, and I wanted to go on a holiday with other girls to the mountains, in Tignes in the Savoie, the card I showed you with all the girls on it, and I couldn't go under my name. So this Director, he liked me, he said, "No problem", he said, "I'll make you a false carte identite", but the stamps that he used were all from the other Director, do you understand? So I don't know how it came about, my father was completely against it, because I was taking a chance. We were there, in those days, it was the Italians who were coming on the train and looking at your papers. So I had a false name, I was called, because of the initials, you must at least keep your initials, in case there are initials on your handkerchiefs or somewhere. I was called Françoise Suvergnay, which is absolutely a name of the region, FS, and I travelled with the other girls in

the mountains, and we had a nice time. Some of the girls must have been Jewish too, but they would, nobody would say it. And when I returned from this holiday, only ten days, I think, in the mountains, I went back to the office, and the lady Director said, "I hear you got a new carte identite, which has really the stamp of the former Director. I have to, you have to give it back to me." You see, they could have given us, the whole family, cards, and when my mother went out, you know, she would have had a French carte identitee, you understand? We could have been saved. They were, they were worried about this old man who didn't know anything about it, you see. They didn't have any gumption or any courage, you see, the young man did it, the young Director. But they said the young Director had no business of doing it, it wasn't his stamp. And she asked then for the card back, so that was it. That was an unfortunate experience, because there were, there were some people who took chances, I tried them, but they wouldn't give it to me. I tried the Marie, there was a certain lady, apparently, that would give cards. I suppose, either people, some people gave them a lot of money or something, but there were very few people who really stuck up, stuck out their necks, you know, to save a few Jewish people. As I said, the nuns were prepared to take us in, in Le Puy, but they didn't, they didn't. The odd one, I only know very few people that were actually helped by the French. Very few. I told you, as patriotic as I was in those days, you know, as little I am today. I have, I was really as French as all the French, you know, when you are young, and today I have no feeling for it any more. I said, "When they could hand over the Jews, on a platter, as they did, without a helping hand, I can have no feeling for them any more. And whatever they do for us", I said, "there's nothing. Nothing." They let us go on those trains, and they let us go away, and they didn't do anything. They didn't try to stop it in any way. So you can't be patriotic any more, can you?

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Is that why you chose not to live in France after the War?

No, not really, no. I lived after the War, in France.

Until 1950?

Yes, because this is another chapter. I came where we are now, on holiday to England. I came on a holiday to England to visit some relations of mine. That's how I was introduced to my husband's family who is related, as I said, at least four generations back, if not five, and that's how I met my husband, and that's how I came to live in England. But I lived in France until 1950, you know, I didn't come to England. I came over as a visitor, and I remained in England for several reasons, because financially I had to sort out my situation. Number two, my husband was religious. After the War I was not religious, I was still traditional, I still liked to keep the Yomtovim, you know I liked this tradition, but I was not kosher any more, and I was not keeping everything at all. But when I met my husband, that was one of the conditions, that I go back to the life I used to know. And he was very eager that his children should be brought up religiously. Unfortunately, he died when my younger daughter was born, she was six weeks old, so therefore, I felt that the least something I must do for my husband's sake, is that the girls should grow up the way he would have liked to see them grow up, you know, that they had a big heart, and a religious background. And that's what I did. I told you I am a believer, I think I am only a believer because I have to hold on to something, but I'm not fundamentally religious at all, really, I think I'm not. I'm not, I think I lost it on the way, you know, it's, I believe there is a God, I do believe there is a God, there is something above, more than just like that, but I didn't go away from the tradition, because I got used to the tradition, and I do it also that it has a meaning. Do you understand, if my daughters are keeping the things, I don't

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want to be the one that's going astray, you know, I don't keep it as strictly as they do, and they know it. And they also know that if I kept everything, like I did till they were out of the house, it's because I did it so that they should know that's the way their father wanted it, you know, and I felt I had done my little bit, you know, I brought them up in the religious schools first, you know, and then they kept, they were in religious circles, and so on and so forth. But, I personally, I cannot say that I've remained a very religious person, you know. I'm always prepared to, to learn, or to know my Jewish history, or to know where I come from, and so on and so forth, but truly religious I'm not. Not after what I have seen, no. In a way, you want to jump from here, where do you want to go from here?

Was it difficult for you to get those jobs?

Where?

In Blâmont, afterwards in St. Etienne, with being Jewish?

No. No, in Blâmont it was a Jewish Company, there was no difficulty in St. Etienne neither. The funny thing is, when we arrived in, in St. Etienne, we were known rather like Lorrains, than Jewish, you understand? We were not, people didn't know they sorted there all these people that come from Alsace-Lorraine these refugees, you know, they didn't even look so much if they were Jewish or not. They're not really, the centre of France didn't have many Jews in those days. In fact, people then ended up in small places, in the Auvergne, right in the heart of Auvergne, where they said "We are trying to hide, because we are Jewish", they just said, "Oh, we thought the Jews had horns", you know, they didn't know what a Jew was. You, you didn't have that problem, you were refugees, you know, you were a nuisance because you were refugees, or they made money out of you, otherwise they were really not that interested in you. No,

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this, I didn't feel the anti-Semitism, was only, where did
we see the, the

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I think there were rather a lot of collaborators in France, at the time of the Occupation, and, and there was some kind of Right-Wing Movement, I can't remember the name, like...something, that did exist, I remember seeing posters, you know, and plenty of people who had, who made money out of this Occupation and the Marché Noir or whatever. I suppose the fact that we had to struggle so much in St. Etienne, and we had to try and hide, hide in a certain way. My mother knew a person from, there were several people from Frankfurt, in St. Etienne, and one man came a few times, disguised, you know, he came with a patch on his eye as a disguise, and he came to warn us that it is getting worse and worse, you know, not to feel so secure, to try and hide more than we did. He did keep warning us. Maybe I should try and tell you one incident. My brother, it must have been '43, my brother Armand, not the youngest, but a younger one, he won a Scholarship in the school he was. He must've been 16, and he was growing, and always hungry, poor chap. He won a Scholarship to North Africa, and when he was in North Africa, he, we wrote to him, he got a six weeks Scholarship to tour North Africa, with other people from school. We all told him not to come back, as things were getting from worse to worse, to stay there. He had an offer to continue his study in the Lycee of Casablanca, and we said, "Please don't come back, please don't." But he wouldn't hear of it. Instead of that, he felt that he had to come back with baskets and baskets of food that he had bought in North Africa, to feed the family. And when he came back, believe me, we had no pleasure in the food he was bringing back, because he had also here a chance to save his life, and he didn't take it. He wanted to be at home with the family. And today, he is a very sick man, he is a very sick man mentally. He suffers a persecution complex, more than any of us, and he had his chance, like my little brother had his chance, but they didn't take it. He had two

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chances, I gave him a chance also then, and he didn't take it. So he came back, and we did take the warning, and we tried to, to find ways of keeping a little bit hidden, and thinking that we, we followed the events, because we knew that they kept taking this foreign person, no Jewish people we knew, which were of foreign nationality, but we knew that the French weren't that safe. It's not because you had a French nationality that you felt that safe. But unfortunately, as I told you, the French had lists and lists, and they just handed them over in the end, so there was no problem for the Germans to get rid of the Jews. Anti-semitism, when it came, the Aciēnēs de la Marine they didn't mind I was Jewish, they knew I was Jewish, the girls that I worked with, they were, I didn't feel that they didn't like me because I was Jewish, not in those days at all, I didn't feel it. Because, I think it was a Wartime atmosphere, it was a Wartime atmosphere, and people from St. Etienne, on the whole, are nicer than the people from Lyon, let's say. We had friends in Lyon, my parents' friends, whose daughter married during the War, and we, I went to the wedding. Unfortunately, these were very close friends to my parents, who originally came from Metz, and I was horrified, when, still in July '44, they arrived in Auschwitz. I met the daughter, the daughter Ida Rosenberg, she came into the Camp, and we couldn't believe it. I said "How come that you are... I mean, France, 6th June there was the Invasion, how come there is still a convoy in July from France?" They said they took them round for one month, through Germany and then they brought them to Auschwitz.

They had left France before the Invasion?

No, no, no.

They left after the Invasion?

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Yes. You see, the 6th June, the Invasion was in Normandy, but these people lived in Lyon, but they still took Jews in July, end of June, beginning of July, they arrived end of July, still in Auschwitz. And some arrived even beginning of August. And by that time, very few came in, very few. Very few people came in to the Camp, but we were heartbroken that they had still time, they still had convoys coming from France, so late, because we were heartbroken that we arrived there on 3rd June, and June 6th was the Invasion, and here are people arriving still in July and August from France, from France, you know. Still arrested in the other half of France, Lyon, Nice, all these people are here arriving. The last bit, you know, the last ones.

You would have thought that by then the Germans would have had other things to do with their trains, their soldiers,

Not at all, not at all, not at all. The other way round.

And that was the most important priority?

Yes. Yes, they had, they had the priority, the final solution had to go through and they continued to come one after the other, and that was in the finish. And whilst this was happening with the last French people, then the others came in, the Roumanians, the Hungarians, the last ghettos arriving, hardly anybody came in. I think, I don't know if you want to hear more about Birkenau or not.

Just before we leave this, you say you went to the Barbie trial?

Yes.

Because of any personal connection with Barbie?

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No, what happened is that I had no personal connection with Barbie at all, because we lived in St. Etienne. Maybe these friends of my parents had, you see, but not us. Why I went to the Barbie Trial, I happened to be in France, and I was meeting my sister-in-law, Janine, in Lyon, and we haven't got really the nerves any more, very much, we feel, it shakes us so much, but on the train down from Paris, I said, "I'm already in France, I'm on the train to Lyon, I think we should go to the Trial. We are the last witnesses, you know, I think at least we should go and listen to the Trial." So when I arrived at Lyon station, I said to Janine, I said, "Janine, I think we should try and go to the Trial." She said, "I can't, you know, it will disturb me, it will make me ill, I'm not going, let's go somewhere nice and eat." I said, "I agree." So we went somewhere nice to eat, and then she said to me, "You must see the Exhibition about the Les Enfants d'Izieux. There was an Exhibition in front of the Tribunal, where they showed the children from Izieux and what happened to the children, which was a very moving exhibition, unfortunately, you know what happened to them. I said to Janine, I said, "Listen, we are here in front of the Tribunal, I think we should go in." There was an enormous queue of civilians who wanted to go in, and there was a priority queue. Because only photographers, press, and so on, were admitted to the Trial, and so we were in the queue which was priority, we showed our cards, we are Deportee Politique, we have a special card.

Who has issued this card? The French?

The French. We have a special card, Deportee Politique, which means that we would have priority to go into the Tribunal. Go into the Court. So there was one or two ladies before us, and then they let us in. Well, we heard a few testimonies, of French Resistance, a doctor, a woman doctor, we heard of one or two Jewish people, we heard such

horrible stories, that I tell you something, even if you have gone through it, it still shakes you, you know. Of cases where women had come with children, they had to choose between letting their children being killed, or to be killed with their children, and the decisions that some mothers had to take, you know, and that were witnesses, there were actual witnesses, and, and things that Barbie did when he tortured them himself. Apparently he used to stand there with a pussy cat, and stroke a pussy cat there, in his hands, and he ordered such horrible things to be done to the Resistance, but you know, even the one who was a Resistant said what he did to the Jewish people, and to the Jewish women, I mean, I can't even repeat it, what he did to them. And he let him die. And he thought that Resistant was already dead, and he wasn't, you see, and he witnessed it. Eventually, after listening to some of these testimonies from these people, I tell you, one felt, I, I was sitting down next to the reporter from, the journalist from 'The Independent', as it happened, and next to a Greek newspaper. That day, you know, Barbie wouldn't come up, he wouldn't come up. That day, at quarter to seven, he had to come up, they brought him up, and do you know, from the pictures that I saw in the papers, where he was a young man, he hadn't changed, do you see? Some people change a lot. He got old, yes, but he hadn't changed, his face was still the same face. Why was he brought up? Forced to come up this time. There were six Resistance people, who had been tortured by him, who were going to identify him this time, they had given their testimony the day before, and they were just going along to identify him, and not one had any doubts that it was him. And then, you know, he had his defending judge there, I forgot his name, I have all the file here, and do you know, if ever there was a viper in Court, that was him. None of the Resistance had any doubts, they said that little grin that he has, and those eyes, they would recognise anywhere. And the Judge, when they say, "Anything to say?" he never said, he never tried to

contradict anything that these people, the testimony or anything that these people said, you know, he couldn't say anything, that they recognise him, they couldn't say anything. The only thing he tried always, is to turn the argument round. "What did you do? What did the French do in Algeria? What have you got to answer to that", you know, and so on and so forth, you know, he tried to turn it round the table. And then there was a Jewish man who was probably a lawyer, who defended that, you know, who tried to defend him, he made a very long speech, but I thought, even too long, but he tried to say that you cannot compare what happened then and what happened in Algeria, you know, you should get out of that argument, that has nothing to do with it. And when they asked Barbie, "Have you got anything to say?" He said, in German, "Nothing to answer. Nothing to ask, nothing to say. That's it." And I have several articles and things from the French papers about it, this Trial. A lot of people came from Israel specially, I met some of the people that came especially from Israel. A lot of French people who had suffered on the hands of Barbie. I did ask that Resistant, I said, I said to him, "You know, we had a Trial after, when we came back, in Lyon, because we, we, my brother knew the name of this, this Milice, he knew the name, and he had seen him before, and we had a Trial, and we said exactly what he did and how he looked and everything, and we saw him in prison, and we were in front of a Military Court, and he was sent for ten years, you know, into prison, and he probably is out and about, and still alive or not, but he probably finished. He got away with murder this Milice. One of them was shot, and this was the one that was still alive. I said to the Resistant, I said, "Tell me, it's a long time ago, you know, and you were still 100% sure that you recognised him." He was rather offended, I didn't mean to say it in that way, I said, "You know, even us, when we went to see this man in prison, after they had shaven off his hair, and he got his prison look, we somehow recognised him, that was two years after, and this

is 40 something years after." But I could see his point, he hadn't changed. Barbie hadn't changed. I tell you something, it didn't do me any good, because I was in St. Etienne, I went to St. Etienne, my blood pressure was 200 over 100, you see, that I didn't feel well. I had to rest a bit. You see, it is, it is not only, we want to be present there, because we want to see what the witnesses have to say, but on the other hand, every time we relive these times, it does something to us, we can't help it. I was a little bit upset about the judge at the time, when the Jewish woman came in, because, you see, you had to go in front of that judge, with all the others, with the jury, and the defending judges, and Barbie and his people, and you had to stand there, and, have no notes, really, or very little, and you had to speak, and the judge interrupted this lady, when she wanted to go a little bit off, do you understand? She wanted to explain a little bit something else, and he cut her short, and I was very upset for this lady, she was a Mrs. Mayorowitz, which I remember her name, and I spoke to her after she had been, out of Court, and I said, "Well, I thought he shouldn't have interrupted you." So she wasn't that upset, she said, "I said what I had to say." But I thought it was wrong of him not to be more charitable, and let her go on, you know, to cut her off, you know, because he must, he should understand that these women are very emotional, and they will lose what they wanted to say if he stops them in the middle, but there, he didn't, he wanted to get on with his processing, you know.

Trial.

Trial, yes.

But the Trial you said, two years after the War, of the two Milice who arrested the

No, the two who arrested us.

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You and your two younger brothers?

All of us.

That was the same,

The same people, they came first, and must have arrested my mother, then they came to the house and arrested us, then they went to the hospital and arrested my brother, then they went on to wait for my father to come back, and then they arrested him.

They were the same two?

They were the same. One was shot.

By whom?

By the French Army when they came in, and they, and they cleaned up a little bit the town, of all the collaborators, they didn't wait for trials, you know, they heard from people that this one collaborated, this one sent people to the Camps, they started to shoot a little bit, you know, they shot quite a lot of people, I understand, after, immediately after they arrived in St. Etienne. They were well-known people who collaborated and they took them, and they, some of them were shot. I don't know how many, but this one, one was shot, that we heard. This one was the Italian one, and he was in prison. But this is the one the trial was about. It must have been, we came back in '45, it must have been '45/'46. At one time, I still had the, what was in the newspaper, I don't know where it is these days, I had

Do you remember his name?

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We had it in the article. I have it somewhere, but I don't know for sure now.

And you all testified?

Yes, we all three testified. And in that article the judge said that we remembered everything very clearly, you know, that we testified very well, and he was condemned for 10 years. As I said, 10 years, he's long out and about. That was '46.

You don't know how long he actually served?

No, we don't know anything after that, no. Where do you want to go on from there, we are back in France here?

I know!

We are back in France. That's only recently, as you know, but I'd like to add something. I heard, and I read also in the papers, that Barbie is now in Lyon, waiting for a second Trial, because he wants to come out about the Resistance, and has nothing good to tell about the Resistance, he said, but this is, France is not very happy with that, you know, that they will have a second Trial, because I don't know what went on in the Resistance, you know, the whole process, Jean Moulin, you know, the famous Resistance leader, and his people. He's supposed to be in the prison, has three rooms, French staff, plus a television, he has 10 people who look after him, and it costs the nation 1 million New Francs to keep him there, per year.

But why? Why are they giving him such special treatment?

Why?

The people whom he has protected by keeping silent?

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Well, that is, at the moment, the treatment he is getting, now he is coming back, there will be another Trial, he is not finished yet, because he wants to defend himself, that the Resistance also didn't behave so nicely. Now, I don't know if it will come up or not, you know, all the dirty linen, I don't know how much they want to listen to it or not, how it's going to be, that I don't know, but we aren't finished with the Trial. But unfortunately, as I told you, it left some bad marks on my brother Armand, that process with Barbie. Again, it went to his head that somebody is trying to kill him, you see.

Where does he live now?

In Paris. Doesn't answer the phone, he is afraid of persecution, he doesn't accept parcels, you see.

Is he married?

He was married, and he has four children, yes, and he has, every so often he is affected by that, and you cannot forgive, you know, the Germans really, they drove him, this persecution complex, he is forever being persecuted, he is forever running. And he's forever frightened. And he's the one who could have been in Casablanca and been out of it, you see.

Were your two brothers together during the War in the Camps?

No, no, separated also. You see, because like I was, I was shifted from one Camp to another, this younger brother was really saved earlier than the others. He remained in Auschwitz, and he was liberated by the Russians, in January '45. Apparently, all the inmates were already assembled, you know, and they had put the Mitrailleur in the middle, they were already going to shoot everybody, when the Russians arrived, so he was liberated the first. And then,

unlike us, who were supervised by doctors, they invaded the stores of where the Germans had all the food. You know, all the parcels that, there must have been parcels that arrived from the Red Cross, which they never gave to the inmates, people, which they kept for themselves, when they found a lot of them, wherever they were hidden in stores, and they helped themselves to food, and they ate and they ate, and they ate, and, of course, that made them ill, and worse, you see, you couldn't eat, and shouldn't have eaten, so he came back via Odessa, he went, the Russians took him to Odessa, took him from Odessa on a boat, back to France. And I think he was one of the first ones to arrive. My brother David was liberated by the Americans. He did, he was on the, on these marches to Gross Rosen, to all the worst Camps, and he arrived, was liberated by the Americans, and the Americans, he was, he had an Anthrax, he was very severely ill, he arrived in Paris, and I think they changed one of the Hotels into a Hospital, the Americans, and there he was treated by the Americans for whatever, the Anthrax, and they fed him very carefully, so that eventually, a few weeks later, they let him come back to St. Etienne too, and that's how we heard through Janine, I don't know whether I told you this story, Janine's aunt that, did I tell you?

No.

No, we haven't gone that far yet, I'm going too fast! And then this aunt came to see Janine, cos they heard that people had arrived, I jump too much now, I think, am I jumping too much really, because I'm going now, really, after the War, you see.

It doesn't matter really.

Is the, they came, we arrived in Lyon, we were also hospitalised, and this aunt heard that a convoy had arrived from Pilsen, and they came to the hospital and we were in

quarantine, because we had supposedly, typhus. We were very thin, we were full of lice and this and that, and they wanted to see to us first, so they came to see us, and they told me that there are, she thinks, two brothers, one brother anyway, is, has arrived in St. Etienne.

She was Janine's aunt?

Aunt, that had not been deported, two aunts, and they told us that one brother has certainly come back, and that he's looking for other members of the family, and he found out, in the meantime, that there, another brother had arrived in Paris, and that he was in a hospital. He didn't know then that I had arrived, you see. And a little story to that one. When these aunts that had arrived from, to see Janine, they thought they would do us a good deed, and they brought a tart, they were very good patisserie, they bought a cherry tart, which we weren't supposed to eat and we were on the second floor in the hospital anyway, so somebody smuggled it up, and we were each, you know, because we were well looked after, and so we took that cake, we cut it in two, the tart, a big one, and she ate half, and I don't think I ate as much as her. Well, as we were only skin and bones, every cherry was showing on her stomach, and she had to be washed out, it couldn't go down, you see, it couldn't go down. We were fed on very small portions, you know, so the cherry tart, that's the story of the cherry tart! It never went down! But that's how I heard that my brother was in Paris, being looked after, and I was in Lyon, and we kept searching, you see, we kept searching, we hoped, we still had hope. With all what we saw, we still had hope, at least for my younger brother, you see, we still hoped that he might be alive. But I think we have jumped now to Lyon, to all kinds of episodes, but maybe I, I should go back a little, to Auschwitz, you know, I think I should go back. I think I should go back for a good reason, is

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Yes, as I said, we arrived in June '44, and we must, I must have been working from June and July, digging trenches, because I can't remember doing anything else but trenches in those days. As I told you before, the, the work was terrible because of the hard work, we weren't used to dig trenches, and being hit all the time, and as the appels, the appels were the worst, the appels, having to get up at half past three in the morning, and, and standing for appel for an hour and a half, without hardly any food, or anything to drink, a lot of them collapsed, and a lot of them already died by then. The conditions, I don't have to tell you, I suppose you read them more than once, is that people slept four in a bunk, which means that you had to sleep sideways, you never could sleep flat. We, when we returned from work, we were distributed, I think we got, like a dog, like throw a piece of bread to an animal, that's how it came to us, you know, each one piece of bread. I think the most awful thing that happened to us, was that we were never allowed to go to the toilet when we needed to go. When you were for appel for an hour and a half, you know, and you have had terrible diarrhoea, and other, you know, you felt you had to go to the toilet, you were not allowed to go, and therefore you soiled yourself, already for, in the beginning of the day, and you had to live with that for the rest of the day. And the same happened when you were at night, you were not allowed to go out, and you had to learn to wait and wait till you really collapsed, you know, and I think that was, that was so terrible, that it's difficult to, to understand what you suffer when you cannot, when you're not allowed to go to a toilet when you have to go, especially that you have terrible stomach aches, and terrible tummy aches, because the food was bad, and wrong. And if you did soil yourself, they would beat you up, so you know, you couldn't win, you just couldn't win. And to wash, there was a kind of cold tap somewhere, where everybody had to go in,

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there was a little water, I can't remember that we had soap. As I said, I had a toothbrush, but I had nothing to put on it, but I had a toothbrush. What developed very early, therefore, was boils, Avitaminose

What?

Avitaminose they call it, you know, abscess. I had them very early. I was covered, thank God there's not much left these days of it! I was full of boils on my, here, on my arms, behind my knees, and they make you, and I right away had shingles. I told you when I arrived, and I saw what was happening, I had like a nervous breakdown, right away, because I laughed for a few days, and afterwards I had shingles. I knew it was shingles, because we had some, there were people who were doctors amongst us, you know, and they recognised it as shingles. I had it in the back here, on my back, and it's, they're touching a nerve, you know, so can you imagine, when they were hitting you on top of that? And the only thing that they, so I went to what they called the Revier, to see the doctor, and the Jewish doctor said they were there, they didn't have many medicines, they had vaseline that looked either pink, white or green, so they put a little bit of that on, with a piece of paper, and that was it, and you had to live with that pain all the time, continue to work and sleep, and four in, in a small thing there, you know, on wood, so that when they touched you, you know, you could scream with pain. And every few days, or few weeks, there was a selection. Therefore, you mustn't look ill, you mustn't have boils, you mustn't look as though you are already going under, this was, that went on every few weeks, you know, when you had to go through the shower, and the delousing, there was Mengele doing his selection, and his call. And the only thing that saved me was that I was, quite, as I said, a healthy looking girl in the beginning, and I had, I had a good body, because I did a lot of sport, therefore I didn't get thin, like some, right away

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did, you know, got bony, so I passed, although I used to hide my arms, you know, that he shouldn't see my boils.

But you were naked, how could you hide them?

You know, you turn it a bit, you know?

So it was the insides of your arms?

Yes, yes, I had them here, inside, because he shouldn't see them. Well, on the, I always remember the date, the 17th August was suddenly a big appel, we never knew what it was for, we didn't know if it was for transport, if it was for the ovens, if it was for what kind of work, or whatever, and I still see myself with that dress that I had, you know, I tried so hard to look clean, or to look tidy, with its little white collar, you know, we still had no stripes in those days, and "You", she said, the German, the woman, the SS, "You", then Janine said, "I'm her sister." "You", then Suzanne that was always there, if you wanted her or not. "I'm her sister too." So we went the other side. We didn't know what it was, you see. And so 50, it, no I'm not trying to talk myself in anything, they usually chose 50 pretty girls for their Commando Kanada. If you looked at it, they were always, you know, they looked for certain types of girls that they wanted for that Commando. So they, they thought the people were very privileged, you know. The privilege it was, was to sort out, if you had to look at it, it already broke your heart to see the mountain of shoes, and glasses and clothing, that you had to sort out, pack, and get ready to go to Germany. And some of the girls, some people found photographs of their family in the clothing. They recognised that their family had arrived, you know, and terrible stories like that. Well, I don't need to go back to the Commando Kanada, because I told you already the story, but I wanted just to reckon this time I spend there, it was August, I must have been only two weeks

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in that Commando, before we were found out, and then we went back to the trenches, and Potato Commando first, which was a horrible Commando, because that was September, probably August/September, when the potatoes are collected. Then came October, back on the trenches. I don't know why we built those trenches, I never found out, but unfortunately, we saw so many horrible things that we didn't want to believe, you know, because, as I said, in Birkenau, the chimneys and the sky was black, and the chimneys were burning, and it wasn't enough, we saw even trenches that were burning, do you understand?

They had thrown people into trenches?

And they burnt the trenches, that the smell of it, you know, actually it was terrible, it was too terrible to live with that year. By that time my feet had frozen, and I remember coming, I went to the Revier, I was allowed to go to the hospital, because my feet were like that, legs like that, and the feet couldn't move any more, the toes. And so she put another bit of that vaseline on, and some paper around, so I couldn't walk in shoes any more. I remember walking back from the Revier to the Barracks, in the Camp, and it was all mud, you know, my feet in this paper, I went in the mud, and out of the mud, and by the time I came back, there was no more, nothing on my feet any more. And they were hurting terribly, but there was nothing that I could do, but the next day go out again, and work again. I hardly could stand on my feet. But if you couldn't stand on your feet, you were finished, you had to go out. And I remember standing there, in the mud, I was crying by then, I was really crying. I looked at those ovens burning, I can remember that, there is also a picture that is vivid in my memory. It was all lit up, the sky. And here was I stuck in the mud, up to here, frozen feet, with boils all over the place, and I think, "What do I do here?" you know. "I can't any more, I just can't stand it, I can't go on." And

I went back, and in that month, there was again, a big selection, and we were selected to go on a transport to Bergen Belsen. And we arrived, I don't know how many days, in Bergen Belsen, when we arrived, we were put, it looked horrible again, on the floor, on straw, we hadn't eaten, I don't know for how many days, and the lice and the filth from the journey again, and we were lying so close together, like sardines, that one girl who must have had dirty toenails scratched my stomach, you understand? And by scratching it with her dirty toes, and the condition, it became an anthrax boil and you know, they, it, first there came a little something, and then you know, whilst we were in Bergen Belsen, there was a few months it grew probably worse and worse, but nobody took any notice, you know, but before, I will tell you afterwards, I just want to tell you this, the anthrax is still a big mark, because we were in Bergen Belsen from October till, till April, and the conditions there were also terrible. We didn't work in Bergen Belsen, we were just, every morning, woken up with a stick, beaten up, put outside for appel, and back in the barracks, you know, we weren't working even. People were just dying because the conditions were such that you were dying, because of the conditions, there was no food, and just lying around and that's it. And that's what I remember from Bergen Belsen is that the treatment, just the treatment, the standing for appel for hours and hours and hours, till people dropped, you know, and slowly more they dropped, and more they died, and that's it, that's how they tried to get rid of us. But this boil that I had, became a bigger boil, and a bigger boil, and I went to see, there was always one Jewish woman who was, who had really nothing, you know, very little to go, to do anything with. She put in some gauze, metres and metres of gauze into that, the

Abcess?

Abcess, with some disinfectant, and after she had done that, we were again going on to another Camp, and we travelled again for four days. When we arrived at the other destination and the doctor took out the gauze, it was full of little worms, you know, what you call? Full of worms, metres and metres of worms, that had grown into this boil, which it never healed properly, you know, it's like when you've had an operation or something, it left me with a mark there, a big, it's never healed up properly, that anthrax, and that was in Ragun, and in Ragun, another person scratched me, you know, because you were lying so near. She scratched me here, on my finger, and that turned into a nasty boil, and so the woman had nothing to do, but she wanted to save my finger, so she just, with a pair of scissors, standing there, cut off a piece, you see? Here. That piece missing off my finger. She just cut off the abscess, like that, like that, without anaesthetic, nothing, just cut it off, to save my finger. But if you tell this today, nobody really likes to hear such horrors, such horrible stories, you know. The conditions, we were by now in Ragun, covered by lice, skin lice, that were in some peoples' skin, eating ridges into their skin. They didn't have a delousing...conditions were bad, so therefore, through malnutrition and bad conditions, it became...we were covered...not only were we...no food, but we had these lice that were killing us, they were eating us up. They didn't give us peace either.

What, they itched?

They ate us up, they ate us up. And there was no flesh, you know, there was just skin and these lice, you know. And then we were all there, when it was, when they were calling for work again, and I was standing there, she said, "This one." So the Kapo said to the SS, "This one is like a rosy apple, she's completely rotten inside." Not this one. It was the biggest compliment that I ever heard, you know!

Because I had colour from working in the trenches, outside. But I was still sent to a factory, and I had to work in a, but I want to come back to Bergen Belsen, because in Bergen Belsen, the terrible part was that they brought, at the end, the Hungarian Jews, direct to Bergen Belsen. I don't know if I told you the story about when we arrived in Bergen Belsen, that one sister recognised her sister, well, the one that was with us, could recognise her sister, they were, she was Dutch, you see, they had kept apart, some Dutch people in a separate Camp, still in civilian clothes, because they had made a deal with diamonds with the Germans, and there was somehow, one convoy which was completely kept apart, so they looked still with hair, and they looked nice and so on, and so forth, they looked nice, they had been in the Camp, but they were still in civilians clothes, and their hair, they looked so human, whilst we didn't look human any more. So, of course, when we passed that Camp, and we entered Bergen Belsen, one sister recognised the one that was dressed, but she didn't recognise her sister, you know. And by that time they were bringing the Hungarians from Budapest that were also saved for a while, you know, with the deal with the trucks that they tried to do. So they were brought in also at the last minute, September, later, and all these people, one day you saw them, the next day you didn't see them any more, and by that time, even, that was January, February, because in April we left again, by that time, we had already mountains of corpses in Bergen Belsen, because people were just dying, there was, they didn't work, but they were just dying, one after the other, they didn't give anything to eat, they didn't make the conditions in such a way that people wouldn't survive, I can't even remember where we washed, probably outside in the little cold tap, I can't remember that there were any facilities at all. And from there we were again taken away from Bergen Belsen, and taken to Ragun. It was called Ragun, I don't know where we exactly were, but we were in a town, where there was a, aircraft factories.

It was within Germany?

Yes. And there we were, you walked, they opened that train in the morning, it must have been early morning, and they let us out, and we had to walk through the town, and we could smell the smell of fresh bread, you know, and we were starving, and all what the Germans did, was spit on us. I will never forgive them that one. They spit on us. We looked like human logs, but there was nothing to look at. We looked so terrible. We were taken there, to this, these barracks there, where they put us in, and then we were sorted out for work. Night shift. The way we were, I mean, we were by then in a terrible condition, already, physically, terrible condition. I was put on a machine, to cut pieces for aeroplanes, she was an enormous machine, and Janine, and we were given a mask, you know, and we had to cut pieces, you were, we had no strength really, but you had to cut these pieces out all night.

With a saw?

Electric,

Just to guide the machine?

Yeh, with the machine, we had to cut these pieces, you know, and it was, you know, we had these masks on because it was steel, these things. And one German supervisor, he could see we were nearly collapsing with hunger. He said, "I bring you something tomorrow" as he passed, he wasn't allowed to speak to us, we were slave labour. And the next day we were already dreaming again, that he was going to bring us perhaps a crumb of bread or something, to survive. What did he bring us? Potato peels. He put in our drawer, and we knew very well that if we had potato peels, we would again have such diarrhoea that we would, but that's what he brought us. Some people were doing some sewing,

and others, and little Marcelline Rosenberg, who was so small, she was on a machine where she had to turn wheels bigger than that table, you know, with two or three others. And then, you know, we worked so many hours a day, but none of the Germans helped us, none of them, none of the people that worked in that factory. They could see what was happening, they saw us, we worked there. I cannot remember anybody brought anybody a crumb, nobody. And there we stayed till, by then, the Americans were getting near these towns, very near, because we heard the planes, and we heard the shelling, and we heard that it couldn't be far, and we were always waiting for liberation, you know, to be liberated before we were dead. But by then we had lost a lot of our people, you know, a lot of the girls that were with us were not any more alive. And we were just about, just about alive. That's when they decided again, to, that the Americans were too near, you know, they should get us away again. And that's when they transported us to Theresienstadt.

When was that?

That must have been May already, end of April/May.

So you were in Bergen Belsen from October to,

I was in Bergen Belsen from October, October, November, December, January I was still there, February, yes, after January, we must have left in February, because we were in the factory February/March, three months, and then from April we were again shifted to, end of April, because we arrived in May. We arrived in May, in Theresienstadt, and that was already a week before the end of the War. That was already one week before, because the people were already running away, you see, the Germans were running away, the Czechs were running away, and we were left behind.

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Did you suffer any permanent damage to your feet or toes?

Yes. Yes. Yes. I, thank God, I have all my toes, but I have problems with my feet, I'm always with my feet. I walk mostly in joggings, and I have lately even two toes, which, on each foot, hurt and they don't see why they hurt, I said that's probably because they were frozen then. Margot Gross had to have them amputated after the War, but I have problems, I have problems with, but I have at least my toes!

How long did the shingles last?

They lasted a long time. They lasted a long time, because also no treatment, you know, no treatment, except that little bit of vaseline, which came off, you know, a piece of paper, how long, in the conditions, you know, if you are put together like that, and everybody rubs on you, and your clothes and so on and so forth. I had, I had, it's now, thank God, you can't see it any more, but for years could see where it was, you know, a clump like that. You can still see, they always ask me, "What operation did you have?" "That wasn't an operation." By my legs a little bit, you know, and here a little bit, here, there is also a mark, a big one is still left, you know, here, here, here, here, here.

That's from the?

Anthrax all over, all, can you see, all marks where it was, you know. But I try to keep at least fit, but this is as far as we get now, you know, I think next time I will go on a little further, but now I have to stop because I have a meeting.

End of F143 Side A

F143 Side B

This is the third interview of Freda Wineman, the date today is 5th December, 1988.

I would like to go back to Birkenau, because there are certain things that I didn't mention in the first place, which is probably very important. In my first tape, I think I didn't mention, which might be important, that after the appel in the morning, which was from 4 o'clock till 6 o'clock in the morning in Birkenau, we used to go to work and pass the Birkenau/Auschwitz Orchestra, which was made up of girls, musicians, and they used to play a march which my sister-in-law, Janine, reminded me was called "La Marche de Radetski", it sometimes is played on the French radio, and she always feels very bad about it, because it reminds her of that march which was played every morning, to go to work, so that we should walk very straight and very fast. When we were assembled for work, we usually didn't know exactly what kind of work we would do the next day, but from my recollection, most of the work that we did, was in trenches, always trenches, apart from the Commando Kanada, and the Potato Commando, I can only remember that I was always working, making trenches. The purpose for these trenches, unfortunately, we only witnessed once, and that was a terrible experience, because we realised that the crematorium couldn't cope with all the arrivals, and they had decided to use the trenches to burn the other bodies, so we were told, too. I also didn't mention very much the, the way we actually lived in, oh, in Birkenau. I think I mentioned that we slept in bunks, there were three, two or three bunks, and I think we were four or six in one bunk, and we slept like sardines, and we could never sleep flat, we always had to sleep sideways. Also, when it came to, we were distributed the food, it means that one piece of bread that we got every evening, the Kapo, or the person that was called, I think, the "Block Elteste", it used to come round

with a basket with bread, and she used to throw it like you throw to an animal, a piece of bread for each. The thing is, we got it in the evening, and we had to be very careful that nobody should steal it from us, because everybody was so hungry that one piece of bread was terribly important to us, and we liked to nibble on it during the day, otherwise we had nothing else to eat, but some of the unfortunate inmates were not so kind, and used to steal it from us, because they couldn't cope with the hunger.

Where did you keep it?

Well, we kept it under our heads, you know, so that, we kept it under whatever we had, you know, but sometimes they still managed to take it from us.

While you were asleep?

While we were asleep.

Did you have pillows, blankets?

We had one grey blanket for the four, or whoever slept there, four of us. No pillows, no nothing. I think we, I don't know if we slept on the bare wood, or if there was something on top, this I cannot remember clearly any more, in Auschwitz. I only know that in other Camps we slept on straw, there I don't know, we were on the hard boards with that one blanket.

And you all had to sleep on your sides?

All on the sides, because there were too many in one.

So did everyone turn at once?

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Yes, if one turned the others had to turn, you know, because nobody could sleep flat. The worst part was, that you were not allowed to go out during the night, if you had to relieve yourself, you see. And I think there was a, I can't even remember if there were buckets in Birkenau, but I only remember more than once, that I was bursting, and I was in terrible pain, and we couldn't go out, and the only thing you could do, is do it, do it, and that's it, and then you remained in that filth, you know, the whole time.

And presumably you did it on each other, because you were lying so

Yes, we were, there was, there was absolutely no way that you could do it. And the first thing you had in the morning, you used to run out to what was somehow, it was really, they were not toilets, they were just like holes in the ground, and a piece of wood on top, you know, a whole line of it, and I cannot remember that there was toilet paper, either. There was no toilet paper. And there were a few taps of cold water where you could, no soap either, where you could wash yourself. And every so many days, you had to go under a shower, and, and be deloused, and be dried up, and usually after that, there was always a selection.

How were you deloused?

We were put in, the clothes were taken from us, and in a special place, were deloused, the clothes.

They were washed in a special sort of

Not washed. I don't know, they were put into something. By the time, by the time we had the shower, and dried, and dried in this warm air, and waited for, we had to wait for our clothes to come back, for clothes to come back, and everybody took a piece of clothing, and that's how we,

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every, every so many days it was done, because otherwise there was no way of keeping clean, except that little bit of cold water.

Did they shave your heads repeatedly when the hair began to grow?

Yes. Yes. We had no hair.

So how often did they shave your heads?

Well, I suppose every time we grew a little bit, they shaved it again, because we had no hair, because otherwise, because of the lice, you know, every time.

What about menstrual periods?

There we never had.

You didn't have them?

No. No. They put bromure in the food, you know, that little bit of food we got in the morning, there was bromile in the food.

Bromure?

Yes. Which stopped the periods, and I didn't have any periods, I think, from the time I arrived, till three or four months after the Liberation. Then slowly it came back, not quite normally, it took a little while, till everything got normal again, till we put on a little weight, and had healthy food, and healthy fresh air, and so on. That stopped, that stopped completely.

Do you know how that worked? How did it stop the periods?

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It just stopped. It just stopped. Whatever they put in, I was told that was what they put in the food, you know, because it stopped it right away.

Immediately?

Yes, yes. Everybody was, had, nobody had any periods, that I remember. So this, the conditions, itself, you know, about washing and keeping oneself clean, more or less clean, was very difficult, therefore, we were plagued by boils and, and not only that, I think, you lose everything, you know, it's very hard to remain, your dignity, you know, they really minimised you, you know, they wanted you to become like animals. And I must say, they, they, when we, when we went to work, and the treatment we had during the work, with the guards and their dogs, by the time we came home, there wasn't much left, much courage left, or anything left, and sometimes we tried to console ourselves by speaking about home, or about food, or, there were so many nationalities, they kept speaking about food that they used to cook and so on and so forth, just to pass the time, because we were so hungry. But we also suffered enormously from thirst, because there was nowhere where you could get a drink, either. And the cold, and the frost, and everything that went with it, but specially, I think, we suffered because we, all the time, could see the ovens burn, and the, when we came back, either they were burning and the sky was red, or it was black because of the smoke. We also suffered from mental torture, because often we saw men being punished. They made them crawl on all fours. We had to stand on appel, and they used to bring in men from Auschwitz, I suppose, because Birkenau was mostly women, and they used to make them crawl on all fours, or on their knees, and beat them up, you know, and have the dogs after them, and we had to witness that, and we found that terribly depressing when we had to witness all that. The other thing, as I mentioned before, to you, is that we witnessed once, outside

the Camp, and we were told afterwards that those lorries, they were closed up lorries, because we have seen also open lorries, they were closed up lorries, and what I have, I couldn't understand why, these lorries were full of feathers, they put feathers in these lorries, and these feathers kept on flying away, and then they asked all these men to go inside these lorries, and they closed the doors, and we were told afterwards, when we asked questions, what happened to these men that were put in there. And they mentioned that that was another way of killing the people.

Did you see them taken out?

No. Every time they, every time they noticed that we were working not far away, or that we might have seen something we shouldn't see, they ask us to go, to return, you know, to our, to, to be taken away. But so many things were happening at the same time, that sometimes, you know, we just saw it, and that was another way of being destroyed. The thing was that when you live in those circumstances, you are nearly 99% sure that you will not get out of it yourself, that you might have one chance, and you're not even sure that you have one chance, because, as I mentioned, these selections were so frequent, and you, you knew that if you were taken ill, and you were put into the Revier, what they called a hospital, or infirmary, there was even more selections there, that you had even a lesser chance to get out. Unfortunately, I don't know if you have heard about it, a lot of people went mad, and we, because I had to go to the Revier because I had this abscess and frozen feet. I used to see, unfortunately, these poor girls that had gone mad. So they kept them for a little while, and then also they were taken for selection and that's it.

You say that most of the work you did there was trenches and most people seemed to be working with trenches, there were also factories at Birkenau?

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Yes. But we didn't work in factories at all in Birkenau. We were not chosen for factory work at all, I don't know, I think some men were in factories, I don't know if women were in factories, not from our block, or from the people I knew. I cannot remember anybody going to a factory. We seemed to be always working, as I said, simply, simply doing trenches.

And the trenches were near the railway lines? I mean, you say you don't know what the purpose of the trenches was, and you never saw them used, except to burn the bodies?

That's what I saw, I only saw it once, because our block was, like, facing the crematoriums, where we were, it was like, nearer than this block, but nearer, much nearer, than that block where the Crematorium.

About 200 metres or something?

Yes, yes, very near. And, because, when I, when we saw the Crematorium burn we also saw the trenches burn, you see, so we were very near. But I remember the, from the block, there was a little road, muddy road, and then across was the Revier, and a little bit further were the Crematoriums, we were terribly near where we were. And the delousing, and the gas, everything was very near, we were actually, aware of all that was happening. Now, the only thing I would like to mention, because I seem to have put right away in the subconscious, all the other details of Birkenau, is the Revolt. The Revolt which happened in October. I remember we were again working in trenches, and our Commando was working somewhere in Birkenau. That day, the sky was so black, that I thought that there was an eclipse, because you couldn't see anything, I thought that can't be, we only, we knew the time, because we watched the sun, you know, we knew when the sun gets up in the East, and when it's 12 o'clock it's high up, and at 4 o'clock it's here, and so we could have an idea of the time. We had no idea of the days, but

we had an idea of the time. But that must have been still early afternoon, because we were still out working, and it was October. We suddenly saw, and then we heard that it was a Revolt. We saw, very near us, perhaps a few metres away, these, some still standing, others not standing any more, being pulled with cords on their legs, perhaps 20 people, 30 people, I don't know how many there were. They were being dragged back to the Crematorium, and when we heard it, this was part of the Sonder Commando who had tried to escape, who were caught, nearly at the end, nearly escaped, were dragged back, and were, were right away taken to the Crematorium. When they noticed that we were again working where everything was happening, they right away said, "Back to your block." But that, that's what we were told, that it was a group of people that tried to escape, again, tell the world what was happening, and were caught, and also eliminated, killed. That was October, and soon, and soon, I think, and soon after that, that's '44, a lot of convoys were arriving from Czechoslovakia then, a lot of new people arrived from Czechoslovakia, from Rumania, also at that time. And one day we were, there was a big appel, again, all the Camp was out, and so many of us, probably again 500 of us, or 600 were chosen, were taken to go by train, to leave Birkenau, and we must have travelled several days, when we arrived.

Just before we leave Birkenau, I want to ask a few more questions. When you say, "They told us to go back", or "They didn't let us out of the barracks to go to the toilet", are you talking about Germans in all these cases?

Usually the two, usually the German guards, and the Kapo. When it's an emergency like that, then everybody was out, you know, all the women, women guards, and the big German officers, the SS, the guards, the Camp Guards, you see, because there there was a big, big, the sirens were going, you know, there was a big emergency, because they're,

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they're people who tried to escape, therefore everybody was out, and everybody was shushed back to the blocks.

But who guarded you when you were in your own barracks?

There we had a Kapo, and what they call it, Stube, "Schtuberfueherin", a few were chosen to look after the barracks.

A few of the prisoners?

Yes. A few of the, of our people were chosen to look after the block, two or three, and, and then there was always a Kapo that was in charge, that was also Jewish.

Do you have any idea how they were chosen?

The Kapo: usually it is because they had been in the Camps for, for several, for much longer than we were. The ones that were chosen, the Kapo chose the ones to do the work in the actual block, the cleaning, or seeing to things, the stove, that were, she chose, you know, she had probably a preference or something, she chose one or two, and then changed them from time to time. But the Kapo itself, it was mostly people who had been longer in the Camps, that had survived somehow. They probably had some kind of zeal, you know, they probably did, I don't know, I suppose when you survive longer, so long, you were already somebody special, because you were not meant to survive maybe more than six months, so some became Kapo, and our people, unfortunately, some of them were very cruel to us, you know, I said before, they were very cruel, they were beating up, they killed, some of them, they did horrible things too, because they wanted to survive, and they did horrible things to us. And I think that some of the Kapos, even today, they don't want to be, the girls that were Kapos in those days, wouldn't

like to be recognised, because they did, they did very horrible things.

Do you remember the name of your Kapo?

No. No.

What was her nationality?

I only remember the two from Czechoslovakia, and the one that we had in the beginning, in, in Birkenau, in that block, I don't remember. I tell you something, when you, when you are in these conditions, and you are so overwhelmed with what is happening, and with your own sufferings, and survival, there are certain things which are not important, her name was not at all important to me. I remember Mengele because he did the selections, and a few others, you know, that were there with him. Not that I looked in his face after the first day, you know, I wouldn't dare look in his face, or look at him at all, you know, because I was so frightened. I rather remembered the few girls which we kept, with whom we kept together, you know, to keep ourselves going, you know, that was more important to me, and to see the suffering of some of the people that used to look for a crumb of food, you know, in the rubbish heap, and things like this, this touched me more than to know what name she was, because I didn't know, I didn't think that I will ever come out and be able to remember her name, I knew that we had very little chance to come out. I often, I often looked to the sky, and I said to, I said, "Listen", I said, "My God! Why do you let us suffer like this? Why are we punished like that? What have we done?" And I said, "We are not going all to die, are we, we can't, we must get out, some of us must get out of here." But these details, to know exactly who was a Kapo, I didn't think was that important. Some people were better at that, but I, to me, it didn't have really a great importance. I was more

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concerned with the girls that were with us, you know, to see if they, how they were, if they were well, if we could stick together and do something for one another, because the chances are so small.

Your little group in Birkenau, stuck together and helped each other.

Yes. Yes.

That was you and Janine,

And Suzanne, and Suzanne, and there was a girl which I saw after the War, and lost touch afterwards, a girl called Oppenheimer, I can't remember her Christian name.

Oppenheimer, she was a wonderful girl, and I only remember that we knew that she came out after the War, and she got involved in looking after Orphans, for children who,

Orphans?

Orphans, yes, Jewish orphans. And then we lost touch.

You were all four French, and that was what you had in common, was it?

Yes. Yes. Yes, we were French, and we used to speak, we used to speak to other nationalities with whom we could make ourselves understood, like the Rumanians often speak French, therefore we could speak to them, and they used to tell us where they came from, what kind of a life they led in Rumania, and what kind, some were religious, and some didn't keep anything, some brought whole pigs to Birkenau.

Brought pigs to...

Pigs, yes, pigs.

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How did they?

Because they brought them in with the convoys, when they arrived, they brought food with them. They were told to bring food, so they used to bring meat and, and I used to say, "How come we have bacon here?" You know, in the soup, in the mish-mash. They said, "The Rumanians". You know, a lot of the Rumanians lived in, worked as farmers, in certain part of Rumania, and they brought all kinds of food with them. But we really kept more in touch with the few French and a few, a few Dutch people. I think we, that's as much as I can tell you about Birkenau.

In what ways did you help each other?

As I said, we could help each other first of all by the time when we used to, we used to bring in clothing for them. Then we used to help them, let's say, if they didn't go out to work, because they were sick, so we would even the meagre piece of bread we got, we might share it with them, you know.

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...about how you helped each other to survive.

Yes. As I said, we, we used to discuss all kinds of things. We used to listen to other peoples' stories, to their life stories, to their kind of, when we were actually in the barracks at night, and we were not allowed to, to speak even, but we used to speak very quietly, and we used to love to listen, when everybody, their kind of lives they had, the children they had, where they went on holiday, how well their children were doing. That kept us going really. We used to try and speak about what kind of, where they came from, and what they did, and what they learnt, and which work they used to do, and so on, to forget the conditions we were actually in. And we used to envy, it's true, we used to envy the people who were half-Jewish, because the ones that were half-Jewish, they would not kill. If you were half-Jewish, they were not selected for the gas chambers, whilst we had no chance. What I also mentioned, which Janine has reminded me, of course, is that we, we did work and we dig trenches, forever, these trenches, and we found, in these trenches, pieces of Russian uniforms and hair. There must have been, because we were together in Auschwitz, I didn't mention it before, with Russian prisoners, and she said, "Do you remember what that meant?" That meant, like the trenches we used to do before, where they used to exterminate people in the trenches, or they had shot them and buried them, whatever, "We only found bones," she said. I tried to forget all these things because they're too horrible, and hair, and things like that. She said, "Do you remember? We found all these bits and pieces?" I said, "Do you know, I always tried to forget these things, they're too horrible for me." We also were together with German, German political prisoners, because the difference was, that we had actually a number on our arm, and we must have had a number on our clothes. The Germans, if they

had, I think, a green triangle, they were criminals that they had put there. When they had red, they were political prisoners, and I remember once, just passing, and he was German, this man, and he said, "I am a German Communist, that's why I am here." Because I must have said, "What are you doing here?" And he said, "I am a Communist", and he came from a town called Saarbrücken, which was very near Sarreguimines, because we were the frontier. The Russians were in a terrible way, because they treated them as badly as they treated us. I remember their frozen feet, they had lots of material wrapped round their legs because they don't even have any shoes, and they looked in a terrible way.

And they were Prisoners of War?

They were prisoners, yes.

Soldiers?

Soldiers, yes, that were in Auschwitz, in Birkenau, they were. And this I had completely forgotten on the first tape.

You were in Birkenau over Yom Kippur?

Yes.

Did anybody notice it, or observe it in any way?

Well, we fasted all the time, but I'm sure that some people like the sister of Relly, who tried to keep Shabbat, you know to count every day was Shabbat, because we didn't know what time was Shabbat, when was Shabbat, must have known when it was Rosh Hashana, and Yom Kippur. I suppose it made us feel worse, if anything, that it was Rosh Hashana, and it was Yom Kippur, and here we were, you know, in these

terrible conditions, and witnessing the destruction of Jewry, in Birkenau.

You don't remember anybody trying to actually pray, or ...

Well, you had no prayer books, you had nothing, so the only thing they could do, really, is, except for her, I haven't seen anybody with a prayer book, you understand? I only remember that the Kapo had a, the Kapos had a little room to themselves, some of the Kapos, and I only remember that I saw a Tallis being used as a curtain, on that little window, and I thought how terrible that was.

Did the prisoners, the inmates, talk about God and religion among themselves? I mean, some people lost their religion, some people found it.

Yes, yes.

Was it a frequent topic of discussion?

I think an awful lot of people lost their faith. A lot of people couldn't believe what was happening to them, and a lot of people couldn't believe that if there was a God, that this could happen. As I said, I kept, I kept my belief only because I had nothing else, I had lost everything, and I had to hold on to something, otherwise I don't think I would have come out. Janine lost completely her faith, and many others, yes, even Marcelline, I think she is a non-believer these days, and she was then, because you couldn't believe that if there was a God, that all this can happen, you know? That you have to witness what you are witnessing, it was too horrible, so, and you had no chance, and you knew that once you were gone, you were gone, that's it. I must say, I was so often, so close to death, that, I think what it did to me is that I learned afterwards, to appreciate everything good that happens to me, and I

probably came out a much stronger individual, but I also have, even if I don't show it, I have a constant fear in me, that has never left me, an anxiety and fear, which has never left me, and I have great difficulties in keeping a balance. I think the fact that I left France for England and married an Englishman, and I felt that people in England wouldn't understand anyway, if I told them anything, and my husband, in the beginning, when I got married, he wanted me not to think about it, he even wanted me to have the operation to have the number removed, because, he said, I must try and live a new life, and forget about ... Forget! You can never forget! Because I still had a lot of nightmares when I got married in 1950, I still wasn't out of this terrible nightmare. If I may, but it's really not the first time, thinking about nightmare, I would like to bring in one terrible nightmare which I had in Paris. I was, since I lost my mother, father and brother, and other members of the family, whom I wasn't in direct contact in Poland, but I, and a lot of my friends in the Camp, I always suffered from that loss, and once, I was staying in Paris, and I was even staying in a hotel that night, I had a terrible dream, what I saw, were bones, only skeletons, skeletons, only skeletons, and there was a music, like the music I used to hear in Auschwitz, and as this music was playing, the skeletons, the bones used to come together, and be again, they were first bones, then they were proper skeletons, and they were dancing, they were dancing. And when I woke up from that terrible nightmare, I did not know where I was, I didn't know I was in Paris, I didn't know that I was in a hotel room. I felt terribly ill and terribly sick, and I don't know how long it took me to regain, again, my consciousness, because I had, I had gone into a complete different world, I was completely away, I don't know, it was like in the Bible, you know, was it that I wanted so much to see the people again I had lost? I couldn't explain it. Afterwards, I asked many people, why did I have such an awful nightmare? Why these come back like that, suddenly?

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Was it the only time you dreamed that?

That is the only time when I saw it that way. I often have seen my parents in my dreams, but I have never had that experience again.

When was that?

This must have been in, in '46, '47, yes. Still a year or two after. Maybe it was the time when we realised, although we always lived, although we were told all along to know that we shouldn't hope, I think we still hoped. But as the years went by, our hopes, you know, were now, left us. Maybe that it was, I never had an explanation for it.

The hopes of, seeing someone again, who might have survived?

Yes, yes, yes. Have you got an explanation for that? I haven't.

When they were dancing, when the skeletons were dancing in the dreams, did they seem happy?

Yes.

There was happy music, and

Yes,

and happy dancing?

Yes, yes. First it was a pile of bones, and then they were coming together, and then they were dancing.

You know, there's a prophecy in Ezekiel about the bones,

Yes, yes.

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But the bones are covered with flesh, and they become real people again in that prophecy.

But in mine, not. No. And you see, the skeletons made terrible noises, you know, as they danced.

The bones rattled?

Yes. But I was completely disturbed. I don't know, I think it took me days and days. I remember waking up in a wet sweat, completely drained, and not to know where I was.

You told me at the very beginning, before we began to record, about a recurring nightmare, that you still sometimes have, of escape.

Running. Running. I still have that one. Did I put it on the tape?

It's not on tape, no.

It's not on tape. Well, that one, I have, because I remember, I tried to escape. I tried to escape.

That was when you were being transferred to Theresienstadt?

Yes. We were being taken from Ragnu to Theresienstadt, when already the Americans were advancing, and they tried to take us away, take us as far as Theresienstadt, because Theresienstadt was mined, they had put mines under the Camp of Theresienstadt, which was supposed to be set up, you know, the mines were supposed to blow up the Camp on the 10th May, and the War was over on the 9th, they still intended to finish off the last of the Camps, you know, even Theresienstadt. So that convoy, which was already, we were 500, apparently, we were 500 girls on that train, and as these trains were being bombarded, or the region was being

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bombarded, every so often the train stopped, and the guard that was in each

Carriage?

Not carriage, these, what you call the,

Car?

No, for animals, we were not in carriages,

Cattle cars?

Cattle cars, yes, there was one guard always, so these guards were frightened, they were already the old, they were old men, already, the young ones had already gone on to the Russian fronts, or wherever, so they ran away, they ran out, and they, thought, "Let the bombs fall on the train, never mind us", by then, we were very very weak, and very few of us could move. We had, I don't know how many dead, I only know we arrived in Theresienstadt, they said that we had 125 that had died on the train, and afterwards, quite a few more had died. But I could see that was the end, that was really the end. So what did I do? The first time Janine was so poorly she couldn't move, so she sat in the train, and I could see that the guard had run away, so I said, "I will try to run away, I don't know how I will do it, but I will try." So the first thing I did, I said, "if I put myself underneath the cattle truck, which has two bars across, then, when the train starts going, I will jump off, and lie on the rails, you know, underneath, and then I will try and escape." Unfortunately, on that station, very far off, to me it looked very far off, two employees from the station could see me under the train, and they came back and they told the German guard that I was hiding underneath, and he pulled me out, and pushed me back in the truck.

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In the cattle car?

In the cattle truck. I was very depressed because it was my trying to escape, and here, they didn't have to say anything, they were civilians, you know, they were just looking after the station, they didn't have to give me away, I could've jumped, I don't know how I would have escaped, but I was only hoping to get away from that train. So back I was in the train, and again the train started to go, once the bombardment stopped, and we went for another, I don't know, another day or so, and again, a bombardment. So this time, he only, again the guard started to, went out, and he started to run away, because he didn't want to be killed, and I said, "This time, it's getting from worse to worse." And we seemed to be not far from a forest, so I said, "This time, I'm going to try and run", but by then, I don't know how much we had eaten the last few days, probably one boiled potato and nothing else. I tried to run this time, I tried to run. I must've run, I don't know how many metres, but I was nearly in the forest, when the guard said, "Stop! Or I shoot." And I came back, and he said, "If you try once more, we will shoot you", because that was the second time he had brought me back. And that is a, this kind of dream, because I was brought back, and I tried so hard to escape, that kind of nightmare recurs even today, but in a different form. I'll explain to you. It occurs as a nightmare that I try to escape, but this time with my children, and I run and I run and I run, and they nearly get me, and, and just at that very moment, when I'm nearly caught, I wake up, and these I still often have, you know, that they are still trying to get me, they're still running, I am still running, I am trying to escape, that happens quite often, and I'm always trying to save my children, and I try very hard, and I nearly, and I nearly succeed, but I then wake up. But I must tell you, when I have this kind of nightmare, I'm very exhausted for a day or two, because as I said, it's this fear that's still in me, you know, which is something that's

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difficult to explain, you know, this, it remains with you. Although as I told you, that is the first time I'm willing to make a tape, and I have never spoken to anybody about it, but I have these terrible nightmares. If I, if I hear anything dreadful, or if I watch anything dreadful, or if I think about it, I might have it, they still recur.

There are other nightmares, then, besides this one of escape?

Yes, I also sometimes see always this little child, you know, with the red hair.

The little boy?

Yes, that little boy, I see.

Do you remember dreams that you had during the War itself? Or in Birkenau?

During the War when I had dreams, I dreamt about my schooldays, about my friends, I was longing to get back, to my school and to my former life, and not to be frightened, you know, all the time, but these were the kind of dreams, this, this, this, this, these dreams with that fear and that angst that I only had since the Camps. My sister-in-law Janine, has never forgiven me for that one, because I tried to escape.

Yes, I was thinking about that.

Yes, and she said, "And you would have left me. And you would have left me." I said, "Listen, there was, we were finished, there was no more chance, you couldn't move, you couldn't even stand on your feet. There was one little little chance," and I was already sorting out, "How will I get into the village with my clothing, and the way I

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looked?" You know, without hair, the way I looked with this clothing, I was already having all kinds of fantasy, I will get rid of these clothes, but I had nothing else to wear. But I had to get out, I just couldn't, I said, "That's the end." It does show you that there was a will to live, that I even tried, at the last minute, to escape. I think I, even from the beginning, you know, from the beginning, I tried to look right, you know, and to have my toothbrush, and to keep clean, do you understand? I wanted to keep something, something. And I always said, "You won't get me, you won't get me." And they nearly did get me, but there was a terrible willpower, I think.

And you think that was a very important factor in survival?

Yes. I think that was very very important, because I think, without any willpower to live, to fight, sometimes sickness overtook completely, you couldn't help yourself, but without that willpower, you could not survive, and many had plenty of willpower, but they were so ill, so sick, and they couldn't, they didn't make it, and Janine only just made it, just, very just, because she couldn't stand on her feet any more, she had no courage any more, and she was too, she was, and Suzanne the same, Suzanne the same. They were just sitting there. Well, when they opened the doors in Theresienstadt, and they had already, Mr. Katz told me afterwards, they had 125 dead girls on the train, out of 500, all the rest had typhus on top of it. And I don't know how many died after, because there was very little hope of survival, already they'd This is the, so I don't know, we have now spoken about that, but we really come back to Auschwitz, and from there to Bergen Belsen.

Do you remember ever singing in any of these Camps?

People?

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People singing, or you singing, or you and your friends to try to

Yes, yes, people, people did sing songs, Jewish songs that they remembered from home, and they did try and, not, not at work or anything, but in the evening, we weren't allowed to talk, you see, we weren't allowed to sing, or to talk, it had to be quiet. So we had to whisper.

So even singing was done in a whisper?

Yes. Yes. We weren't allowed to demonstrate or do anything, we weren't allowed, you know.

Were they, do you remember singing yourself?

I can't remember this thing at all, at all. I think one was far too depressed to sing, you know, this, the thing that, I remember one thing, there were some girls who were really, who were put in a trance, do you know, what they call it?

Hypnotised?

Yes, do you remember the girls that are very fair, that have no colourings, what do you call them?

Albinos?

Albinos. Albinos. There was one, and there was one woman who could put this person in a trance, and then she would ask this person questions, and then, of course, you know, that Dutch lady asked about her baby, and other people ask about their relations.

Oh they asked this albino?

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It was now in a trance.

I see.

That thing they did once or twice.

And did she have answers?

Yes, she had answers, you know, sometimes she used to say, "I see the ovens burn, and I see this one going in, or that one going in", and, and this one is still alive somewhere, you know, and things like this, but whether it was true or false, we didn't know. It's just that people were so eager to know what happened to their relations, because I think I told you before, that some people in the Commando Kanada, who used to sort out clothing, thinking that part of their family was still alive, and find clothing of their children, or their relations in the heap, you see, because they never came in, so they realised what had happened. But you tried, you wanted to find out, you didn't want to believe what, you didn't want to believe what Malla says, you didn't want to believe what you saw in front of you, and every time you looked, if you saw still somebody who might still be alive, maybe they escaped, maybe they didn't go there, you know, maybe they, something happened. You had to live with that one chance of hope, that maybe somebody is still alive.

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Huguette...a lovely girl, [Janine's sister Huguette (see Summary)] but she was put in the Commando, and continued to do trenches, and we kept in touch with her, and helped her, but when we left for Bergen Belsen, she remained in Auschwitz. My brother Armand, who was also in Auschwitz, remembers seeing her in the hospital, the infirmary, where she was, where she was very very ill, and she, in January, the, Auschwitz was liberated by the Russians, and unfortunately, she died in April, '45, she didn't make it. She was, I think she had tuberculosis, pneumonia, tuberculosis, I don't know, she didn't make it, she never came out. She had a confirmation from the Red Cross that she died, and I think they said this date, 21st April, 1945.

You said that when you used to talk amongst yourselves, you used to talk about the lives you had led before the War.

Yes.

Did you also talk about the future as you hoped to live it?

No. No. No. We never spoke about the future, because we didn't see any future at all. We lived from hour to hour. We only liked to speak about pleasant things, you know, like, what you used to do, where you used to go on holidays, what you used to eat, that was very important, or how you used to cook it. It kept your mind off things, you know. And then people, people used to do the most terrible things, you know. They said, when you had boils, as we had no disinfectant, if you use your urine and you put it on top, it will clean it. That was primitive medication came in to being, you know, people tried to help themselves, you know, was primitive things you could find, because they had nothing, absolutely nothing. God forbid if you had a toothache or anything like that.

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What happened if you had a toothache?

Well, I suppose you had it pulled out, you know. I will jump now, because I nearly lost all my teeth, you know, by the time I arrived in Bergen Belsen. And we had pyra

Pyrrhoea.

Pyrrhoea. All my teeth were loose, and the gums were hanging down, so I went to the dentist, a Jewish woman, but all what she had, like everywhere, she might have had one little bit of disinfectant, a bottle of disinfectant, that's all what she had, and she had a kind of needle, and that day, she, she put some of this disinfectant on the needle, maybe she had some paper or cotton wool, I don't know if she had cotton wool, and she went in between each tooth, and gums, and she tried to disinfect it, and what was amazing is, that the first thing when I arrived in Lyon on the liberation, when they on 4th June, the doctor, an officer, you know, still in his uniform, he came to greet us, and he said, "How did you manage to keep your teeth?" You know.

Was it so exceptional to keep your teeth?

Yes. It was, because of pyrrhoea you lost your teeth, you know, they got soft, you had toothache, they went bad, you know, and if you stayed longer than a few months or a year, you certainly lost your teeth. Because the malnutrition alone, not the right food, and so on, so everybody, you know, their teeth went black, and I had my toothbrush, but I had nothing to wash it with.

Did you use your toothbrush?

Oh yes, I always used that, and I went in the morning, and I took a little water and I scrubbed it a bit, you know.

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And where did you keep it during the day?

It was hung on my belt, you know, it was hanging there, you know.

You walked around with it all day long?

Yes.

So you had no knickers but you had a toothbrush?

I had a toothbrush, yes. I, that, that is so clear in my mind, because I remember giving up my bread, the first thing I did, you know, for that toothbrush, I couldn't believe that I had nothing at all. But they, the conditions, I have read other books, conditions were bad in other Camps too, but I think in Birkenau, probably Treblinka must have been just as bad, were, was one of the worst Camps, it must have been the worst, for conditions, for cruelty, for extermination, for everything. And after that, after we left Auschwitz, and we were in Bergen Belsen, there I said to Janine, "What did we do?" She said, "You didn't do anything, they just starved you to death." And they hit you, and made you stand for appel till you drop, and that was the end, and you slept on straw, which is right, and again, so many that went always to sleep like sardines, and that's why I had these anthrax. And by then I had so many boils that it wasn't true. And no, no help, no medication, no nothing, and I suffered a great deal from that, plus the lice. So this was torture in itself, and when he came in, that was a madman, I'm sure this was one out of a madhouse that they had, that guard, in Bergen Belsen. He came in in the morning, in these barracks, and before he had time to say "Get up", he had a stick and he hit everybody, he hit everybody, you know, he came in, he hit you on the head, anywhere that he could. Your bones were broken before you got out, before appel, and so they just let you stand for

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appel till you dropped, for hours and hours, they just let you stand for appel. They gave you so little to eat that you couldn't hardly survive, the funny thing I never knew, I can't remember today if they gave us anything to drink.

Just whatever liquid there was in the soup?

Yes. But you didn't get much, you know.

And what about when it rained or snowed, did you try to collect water, or was there any,

No, no, no, when it rained, and when it snowed, you stood, as Janine said, "You stood in the rain and you were soaking wet and with these clothes, you remained all the time."

And you had nothing but the one cotton dress?

That one striped uniform. The striped Camp uniform.

And no underwear?

Nothing, no bra, nothing, no, nothing, nothing. And if you were lucky you had shoes with two heels, or you had one with a heel and one without a heel, and it's true, we were wet, and when it snowed, that I will always remember, it was 1st January '45, it was New Year's Day, in Bergen Belsen. The whole of Bergen Belsen had to come out at 6 o'clock in the morning, stand for appel in the snow, and snowing, the sick were taken from the infirmaries, had to stand, and everybody in the Camp had to be outside, all day, without food, without anything. Now you count the number of deaths that they had that day. And the next thing you knew, you were thrown back onto your pile of straw and that was it. So if you survived that day, from that onwards it got worse and worse in Bergen Belsen. The mountains of corpses, you know, used to be bigger and bigger and bigger, because of

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the cold, and the, no food, I don't know how much we got there, a tiny bit of something, and the dirt, and the lice, and eventually, you know, people just died. So I was there from October, sometime in October, end of October/November, November, December, January, February, February. I think in February, because January I was still in Bergen Belsen, February we must have been moved to Ragun.

Why were you moved?

No, February/March. Because the Americans were advancing, they liberated...the English...no, the English liberated Bergen Belsen in April. We were moved, because you see, they always moved people, as the advance of the Army, the advance of the Americans or British, they advanced people to finish them off somewhere else, do you understand? So in that case, they took us, as I said, to Ragun, and in Ragun, again, in barracks, again in barracks full of, I can only, I don't know why, but in Ragun I remember the itching was worse than anywhere else. By that time, you see, we had no delousing any more, you know, in Auschwitz, they put you in this delousing thing. Here, you were just left with all your, by that time, the lice were everywhere, in your skin, and in the clothing. So they send us to work in that factory, I told you, that factory, I think I have already mentioned it?

Yes, the aeroplane factory in Ragun.

You got it?

Yes, yes.

And there we worked till, till the end of April, because, till the beginning of May I suppose, because we arrived a few days before the end of the War, in Theresienstadt, so we must have worked there till the end of April, six weeks,

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seven weeks, that's all, because the, there were again, a lot of bombardments in those days, the British must have been very near, because I remember we had to go into bunkers, you know, when they were bombing the factory, or out there, they were bombing. But all I can add to that is, that the Germans didn't help us, the civilians didn't do anything to help us, or to give us anything, to help us to make things easier for us, and they saw that you were slave labour, and they could see what conditions we were in, they didn't do anything to help. They didn't even look us in the eye, you know, they.

By now your hair must have grown in a bit, because after Auschwitz, they didn't shave you?

They must have shaved us, because we came back without hair.

Really?

Yes, they kept shaving, yes, because we came back without hair. It's only from May, you know, from the Liberation, till June when we arrived back in France, I must have had 1cm. of hair, that's all, I remember I came back with 1 cm. of hair.

So you were moved out of Bergen Belsen, and then out of Ragnun, to keep ahead of the advancing British and American Forces?

Yes, yes.

But why were you moved out of Auschwitz in October? Were the Russians that close? Or November, you said.

Yes.

Do you think that's why you were moved out of Auschwitz?

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Maybe. Maybe they had too many people.

In Auschwitz?

In Auschwitz, they had too many people. Whilst we were there, the gas ovens were still going full steam, remember. I don't know if they were still bringing people, because that was October. In August/September I know they are bringing from all countries, from Europe, but in, after that I don't know where they were coming from. They might have brought them from Poland, you know, the last of the Polish Jewry. And I suppose they knew that the Russians were not far, you know, because in January they liberated, so this was October, November, December, well, it could have been that the Russians were advancing, because my brother, my brother who was Liberated by the Russians, says that just before that, they had put all the prisoners in a circle with a machine gun in the middle.

In Auschwitz?

Yes. To kill off the rest, and the Russians were arriving. They were just about Liberated.

Another few minutes they would have all been shot?

Yes, yes, yes.

Does he remember what the Russians did when they arrived?
How they?

Oh yes, yes. They Liberated the Camp, and they, they fed them and they looked after them and so on and so forth, yes, that was mine, Theresienstadt, that helped me, because I was also Liberated by the Russians. You see my brother was Liberated by the Russians in January, I was freed by the Russians in May, because first the Americans were supposed

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to Liberate Theresienstadt, and then the last minute, something happened politically, and the Russians moved in. So it was also the Russians in our case. Although we were disappointed because we were looking forward to the Americans, but I think that the Russians behaved very well at the Liberation of Theresienstadt. They did everything they could for the survivors, and they, apart from the first few days, when some went berserk and raped a few girls, that I know of, they tried and helped the ones that were gravely ill, gave the others some food so they could look after themselves, and now they had to wait for some kind of understanding between the Americans and the Russians, so that people who had to go back to France, and Belgium, and so on, arrangements had to be made for us to be flown away. We were, I don't remember if I mentioned, did I mention we were taken to a castle?

No.

No. We were taken to a castle that was transformed into a hospital, and we were looked after for a few days there before we went to Pilsen. And there we were bathed, and got nice clean nighties, and we were looked after by German nurses. We gave them hell! And they used, they did what they could, and they were going round crying. They were crying for two reasons, crying because what they saw I suppose, wasn't such a nice sight, crying because we were not very nice to them, either, because we wanted them to know what had happened. But at least we got clean, you know, washed, and had clean beds, I'm surprised that we could sleep in those beds, because we were so used to just sleep on boards, we were sleeping two or three nights there, till the Americans then took us to Pilsen.

What sorts of things did you do, or say, to these German nurses?

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I suppose what we said to them, you know, we called them names, to start off, probably, "You murderers, you killers, you know what you have done to our people. Did you know what happened in Auschwitz? Did you know that you murdered millions of people there in the Camps? And did you know what we look like?" You know. We were skeletons, we were skeletons, we were 35, 36 kilos, maximum, and we didn't look a pretty sight really, and we were covered with boils and things, you know, we weren't very pretty to look at, and they tried to help us.

Do you remember any cases of retribution, of revenge, that were carried out spontaneously?

Yes, Yes. Yes. We were, I told you, we were together with North African girls.

Jews?

Yes. And they were older, there was one woman, in particular, that was older, we were 20 and she was 35 or something, and she had lost her child when she arrived, or two children, I don't know. She was a real survivor. I know that we were told, I was far too gone to notice it. We heard that she did something with a German guard, you know, the last minute, so that she could get a potato or two, you know, the bucket of potatoes were for all the girls, you know, sometimes you were lucky, you got one, sometimes you were unlucky, you didn't get anything, but she managed to get more than one. I was told she, she didn't get it just like that. But we were far too sick to notice anything, but some must have noticed something.

In Theresienstadt?

This is on the train to Theresienstadt.

On the train itself?

Yes, during the night, I don't know. When we were in Theresienstadt, and we were in that block, that school, by now, and that was just when the Russians, or before the Russians came in, when the Germans started to flee, and she was with us in our block, because she was French, so she came back one day, with a piece of jewellery you know, a rhinestone, a beautiful rhinestone, an enormous rhinestone, with a gold chain, and a ring; she said, "My God! Where did you get that from?" She said, "I just killed my first woman, German woman, and her child." And I believed her, because she had her jewellery on her, and I can assure you, at that time, I was also capable of killing somebody, if I would have stood on my legs, but I couldn't, I was too weak. But you felt, if you had a knife, she did it with a knife, she said, if you had ammunition of some kind, you were capable of killing, because you saw so much being done to your own people that you were capable to have, to want revenge, directly, you could do it then, on the spur of the moment, that's the only case that I know of. I don't think that we approved of it even, you know. We were capable of doing it, but I don't think we approved, you know, we said, "My God!" you know? And I think most of us were far too weak, and too ill to go for revenge, you know.

I think afterwards there were groups of Jews that went around looking for

Ah yes! I, I think that, and I can understand that. I think I would have been, once I could stand on my feet, I could have easily taken a gun and shot a few, I could've done it. But as we were taken from, as we were taken from Pilsen, back to, by air, to Lyon, and hospitalised, did I tell you when we arrived in, we were taken by plane, the first time I went on a plane, it was an Army plane, you know, not with seats, you were in hammocks, the ones that

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were very ill were in hammocks, and the others were just sitting, like the Army, you know, used to travel. It was a Hermes, I think these planes were called, Hermes, I think. We arrived by plane from Pilsen to Lyon, and in Lyon as we came down, I suppose they'd given us already some kind of clothing, we were given a carnation, each of us, as we were coming down in the plane, I remember, and then we were assembled, at the airport, and taken by coach to the Croix Rousse, the Hospital de la Croix Rousse, where they had made a lunch for us, or something to eat for us, and I remember that was the first meal I saw, there were mashed potatoes, meat in gravy, a glass of wine, and some bread, white bread. We all sat around these tables and we looked at it, and we took one bite, and that was as much as we could eat, one bite! We were crying, because here we had the food, and we couldn't eat it. Our stomachs had shrunk to one bite. I think we never touched the meat, we just took the potato, and once we had swallowed that one bit, we couldn't any more eat, we couldn't eat.

And that was already after a period,

At Pilsen we didn't have much either, no, the Americans didn't really look after us that well.

No?

No, no. Unfortunately, I have nothing good to say about it.

Really?

No, no. No, the American Army didn't look after us well. They gave us the same terrible bread which gave us diarrhoea. Not the ones that looked after us, my brother had American people, Army, who looked very well after, but not the ones that looked after us.

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What about medical attention in Pilsen?

None. We didn't stay long, a few days. The medical attention, the first thing they did, I think, even before we got to the hospital, I think, we got a jab, that long, against, I don't know how many things, in our arm, there was no flesh, you know, imagine they did this to us, and there was only skin and bones there, and to have a jab! The next thing they did, in the hospital, they put us in a bath that had all the disinfectants you could think of. I think I might be unfair, where did they treat the lice? I think it was already in Pilsen. I'm not sure if it was in Pilsen that they already looked for the lice, the skin lice, before they sent us off. They had special lamps where they could see the lice in the skin, that's how they saw them, I can't remember if it was Lyon, or if it was still in Pilsen that they, they detected that we were full of lice, in the skin. So they put us in that bath, that smelt terribly, and they disinfected us, the hair and the skin, and then they gave us each a room to ourselves, we each had a room, and we had a proper bed, and sheets, and we had, each had a nurse, you know, each was looked after individually. So there were a few of us that had always been together, so that we were nice, we were a few of us in the same, we weren't in a ward, we were in separate rooms, but we could go and visit each other, you know, and see how they are getting on. And there they were very careful, they realised that food was as dangerous to us as the lice. They brought us tiny portions of food, because I think as I said, in Theresienstadt, I had typhus, remember, when I was so ill.

When you had the fever?

Yes. But here they, they checked the lungs and everything, they, I think they kept us two weeks, and we were in quarantine, because of typhus, because of infections,

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because of everything, but at least they looked after us
very well, and after two weeks

End of F144 Side B

NATIONAL LIFE STORY COLLECTION
LIVING MEMORY OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

FREDA WINEMAN

interviewed by Taffy Sassoon
Part Two

F145 Side A

Yes, the American Joint, I can only imagine it was the American Joint that gave them money, at the time, to send us for three months convalescing in the in the Chambon-sur-Lignon. There was somebody in St. Etienne that took care of the survivors. They told us that for three months, we should just relax. We were put in a kind of boarding house, you know a nice little boarding house, where they gave us good food, and a bed, amongst other things, and fresh air, and we were, he stayed with us, you see, this was like a monitor, who stayed with us all the time, so that we went for walks, and we had entertainment, we were even given dancing lessons, you know, so that we had distractions, you know, and you mustn't forget that the average age was 20, 21, 22, we were all very very young, and we gained strength. My, Janine already had in mind that she wanted to get married to my brother, although my brother was supposed to finish his studies, but she wanted to get married to my brother.

When had she seen him all this time? Besides the original transport to Auschwitz?

She hadn't seen him.

She hadn't seen him since then?

No. She hadn't seen him since then, and she had a boyfriend before that, but she didn't want to know this other boyfriend any more, and she wanted to get married, and the doctor said, "I would advise you not to have children for four years after", after the deportation, you should give yourself four years. You mustn't forget it took a long time before we had our periods back, another few months, and, until you gain some weight and a bit of strength, you could carry her in one hand, you know, we were

very light. So after the three months, I must find a picture I have. Whatever we put on in weight, was really fat. So you will see a picture of me with a lovely round face, the hair a little growing, but all what I had was fat. When I used to eat, I used to perspire, the effort of eating, strength we had none, fat we had. But the French Government agreed that we needed exercise, massage, and being still cared for, you know, by a doctor. So we used to go for exercise so often a week, we used to have massage to get rid of the fat so that muscles should come back, instead of fat, and I weighed, from suddenly, from being 35 kilo, I went up to 60 kilo, because I couldn't pass a bakery without going in and buying bread, or buying cakes, you see, we had been starving for so long, that bread was terribly important. We always had bread, you know. We also liked cakes, but the bread, we had always bread, lots of bread. It remains to this day.

Really?

I still have a leftover. I always have too much food in the house. I have more food than I need, there is never a shortage of food.

And you can't throw it away?

I do throw away sometimes, because I can't, my stomach is very delicate, you know, I can only eat things that are very fresh. I cannot eat things that are warmed up, or kept for a few days, and so on, I'm still very delicate like that, but I cannot bear waste, like I see in America, you know, everything that's not used immediately is thrown in the trash bin, you know, this I cannot bear, it still hurts me, but, I, I, I have to have food in the house. The American Joint also provided for us, a bed, sheets, covers, a table, little stools, I suppose a little bit of crockery or

something to start off, and we found a little apartment, so that all three of us could live together.

You, Janine and Suzanne?

No, Janine, no, only my brothers and me, by then. Janine went back to Alsace where she came from, and she stayed with a cousin, a well-known family, the Neher family, Judge Neher, his brother was Andre Neher, the historian, who wrote, who is a Jew, he died recently, a few weeks ago, he died, in Jerusalem. I knew them well, cos I come back just a little bit, because we stayed in Lyon, they were in Lyon at the time, the Neher's, and when we came out of the hospital, we stayed a few days with them, they gave us accommodation, was her cousin, her first cousin, Julienne Neher, and they offered us a bed, but you couldn't sleep on that bed, we slept on the floor.

Really?

Mmmm. And then Andre Neher was not married then, he was living there with his mother and sister. His mother, his sister, I've forgotten now the name, she was married to a man, they had opened an Orphanage, and they had three hundred young children in that Orphanage, and when we saw those little orphans, it broke our hearts, you know, there were 300 little children there, that they had taken care of, and probably trying to place them, you know, try and see if they had still family, and we stayed with, with this family for a few days, and then we went back to St. Etienne, and Janine stayed with the Nehers who were her relations, and went back to Strasbourg. This family being very Orthodox. It was very difficult for Janine to cope with their Orthodoxy. She would do everything to spite them, and she was utterly unhappy in that religion. She loves her cousin, she's still very friendly with her cousin, she couldn't take the religion, she couldn't cope with it, and all what she

wanted was to marry my brother. So they got married in July '46, against doctors' advice, you see, she was completely lost, she didn't belong anywhere, she didn't feel she belonged to her family any more, she felt lost, because her mother, father and sister, died, were killed. So she only wanted to get married and have her own family, and that's what happened. And my brother gave up his place that he had at University in Paris, and got married. I sometimes wonder if he regrets it, because he always wanted to continue with his studies, but that's how it was, the circumstances.

Did they have children right away?

Yes. The first child came soon after. A second child a year, twelve months later, and then three years later she had Huguette, and then six years later she had Claude. She had Jacques, Patrick, Huguette, and Claude, lovely family. They're all fine, you know, but she did it against doctors' advice, but she had one right away.

And they were all right, and she was all right?

Yes, they're all, the first one was born in the seventh month, early, but he's fine, perfectly all right.

It was like your own family, two boys, a girl, and a boy.

Yes. Yes. Yes.

For your brother it was like reconstructing his own family.

That's right, yes, three boys and one girl.

And the girl is the third, like you are.

Yes, I was the second.

I thought Armand is older than you?

No, younger, three years younger than me.

So you and David and Armand set up house for yourselves in
...

No, Armand, Armand went to Paris and he studied, he studied
patterns, how to cut patterns.

Patterns?

Patterns, yes, for couture. Yes, he was sent to a very
fine French Academy for Patterns.

To cut or to design?

To learn how to cut, you know.

What do you call that?

A pattern-cutter. And he qualified, and he did very well,
and he was working, when he finished studying, he was
working, and he was cutting uniforms, you know, for the
Army. He was doing all right till he wanted to fight in
Israel, in the War of Liberation, you know, in 1948.

Did he go?

Yes. And he fought in the War of Liberation, and he was in
a lorry which went over a mine, in Beer-sheva, and he was
one of the only survivors, but he was gravely injured. So
with being deported very young, he was mentioned in
Dispatches, you know, at the time, he was in the Palmach,
but healthwise, it did do a lot of harm to him. We begged
him, like we begged him to remain in North Africa, we begged
him to remain in Israel. We had family in Israel, we had a

family on a kibbutz, we had family in Tel Aviv, we begged him remain in Israel, "Make your life in Israel", you know, even in a kibbutz, you know, a kibbutz life didn't appeal to him. "But stay in Israel, you stay there, make your life there." No, he couldn't part with France. And I think that was his second mistake, the one in North Africa, where he could have made, he could have continued his studies, and he perhaps, live there out of, he didn't have to fear to be arrested, and Israel, well, I don't know, he could've made a better life for himself, but he wouldn't, he came back to France. That was his destiny, you know, he chose, he had, I always feel these two younger brothers had different chances, and didn't take them, you understand? Armand, who was given two chances, didn't take them, made a mess of his life. And the youngest was given one chance to run away and didn't take it. And that, that worries me quite often. Because these, these were people who had a chance, do you understand? And didn't take it. It shows you how it turns out sometimes.

Destiny.

Destiny, exactly. But Janine married my brother, and she's still as much in love with him as she was the first day! And unfortunately, as I said, she lives with the past, she finds a relief in teaching, or talking to the children in the grammar schools, she is making a tape. It is her that has done all the research, in the Archives of St. Etienne, to find who was deported, and who came back, that made sure that plaques with their names on, were erected in the town, and something was done in the Synagogue, and it does occupy her, but I find that, I don't know if it's so good for her, personally. But she feels she has to do it. She feels she is the one also, now that names were mentioned in the 'Journal Officielle', that felt that she had to do it, to see that everybody has it, and it should come in the 'Journal Officielle', that they should recognise it there,

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that they were murdered in Auschwitz, you understand? She finds she had to do it. But I don't know if I mentioned to you, and I haven't accepted it yet, that the 'Journal Officielle' gave the date of arrival in Auschwitz for my parents on the 2nd of June, and for my young brother on the 4th of June, did I mention it to you before?

No.

She gave me that paper when I was last in France, and then I took it and when I was doing my 'creoux', I studied it, and I said, and it disturbed me, it really disturbed me, and I rang her back, and I said, "How come that you have two different dates? We arrived together, it happened together." She said, "How do you have a discrepancy in the dates?" I said, "It worries me, if they still separated my young brother at that time", do you understand? So I still haven't finished with that record. She said, "Don't try to do anything", she said, "because I don't know which record they used." I said, "They must have used the records from Auschwitz, because they have records in Auschwitz," you know, they wrote everything down. So I personally, I will still make enquiries. Why have they got two different dates?

What kind of enquiries can you make now?

I want to know where they got the dates from. As far as I know, we were, my mother and my young brother, and that baby, were together. What I would like to know, did they separate them again, or didn't they? I don't think it will help me, but I don't like, it, it worried me, can you see why?

Yes.

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Because it's the first time the French have officially recognised, it took all these years to say "Yes, we the French now recognise that these French citizens have been murdered by the Nazis, no, by the Germans, in Birkenau." So I think perhaps we stop here this week, and then I speak to you again.

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This is the fourth session of our interview, and today is 1st January, 1989.

I spoke to Janine, who found a little booklet where she put the dates down, immediately after her return in 1945/46. The dates are nearly all the same as I remember them, which means that we, that I haven't mentioned before, we were actually arrested on 17th May, we spent, my brother Armand, and Marcel and me, we spent several days in the Gestapo cells before we were taken to the Caserne where they had assembled the other Jewish people, and there I found my mother, my brother, and my father. On the end of May, it must have been, we must have travelled five, four or five days from St. Etienne to Auschwitz. I only remember that it was Pente-côte in France, when we were arrested, that weekend, and that we left St. Etienne, and we heard soon afterwards, that St. Etienne was bombed, but by that time, we were already in the train to Paris. I think I mentioned the journey to Paris, didn't I?

No.

Never?

No.

When the Gestapo came to me, I did mention it to you.

About the typewriter?

Yes. To Drancy, we must have travelled four days, or five days, four days. We arrived in Drancy, it must have been the end of May, towards the end of May. I think we only stayed three or four days in Drancy, before we were assembled again, and taken away to, to the station, herded into these cattle trucks, cattle cars, or cattle trucks, and there we were together with Janine's parents, and her

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sister, and my parents and my, my whole family, and other people from St. Etienne. We arrived in Auschwitz, Birkenau, on 3rd June, 1944. I remember that, I think, clearly, because I was counting, because my brother's birthday was on 3rd June. Now, Janine had written it down, I don't know, but I was about, I thought it was about the same time, we left Birkenau on 30th October, '44, we must have travelled four days. We arrived in Bergen Belsen on 3rd November '44, where we stayed, where we were then, from November to 3rd February '45. In February '45, we must have travelled again, four days, when we arrived in Ragun, and she confirmed that it was called Ragun where actually the factory was, where we worked in the aeroplane factory. As the Americans were approaching, we again, were taken from Ragun, again 500, or 600 girls, and we travelled from the 13th April, '45, for nine days, before we reached, on 22nd April, '45, Theresienstadt, where I think I mentioned before, we had already 125 corpses with us, not counting the ones who died after. We were in Theresienstadt on 22nd April, but really, we were not Liberated yet, it was only a time when the Germans realised that, either the Russians or the Americans can't be very far, and they were only trying to escape at that time, so we were really left to ourselves there for a number of days, but as I mentioned it before, I was very very ill, desperately ill, and I only realised that by the time the Russian Army liberated Theresienstadt, it was actually already 10th May, which was one day after the end of the War, and apparently, on 10th May, the Germans wanted to blow up Theresienstadt. You see, they had tried to bring as many who haven't been exterminated, to another Camp, they kept taking them from one Camp to another, till eventually they will be somewhere where they will kill the ones, the survivors that were still around. We stayed from 10th May till 31st May in Theresienstadt. As I explained before, there was an epidemic of typhus, most of the people that were not in Concentration Camp, that were from Theresienstadt, had left Theresienstadt, the ones that had

been interned in Theresiendstadt. The ones who were left were mostly the people that arrived from the Camps, from other Camps, therefore too sick to move, and so a few doctors took care of the ones who were very sick, and the Russians took over then, from 10th May to 31st May, the Russians took over Theresienstadt, and hospitalised the very very sick, and tried to keep the others alive, but it wasn't before the 31st May that they decided that some of the transport could leave Theresienstadt, because there was too much sickness, they couldn't let us go before they gave us a clearance. Now, the only thing is, I told you that we were, at one stage, in a hospital in a castle. Now, the thing is, I think we went from, from 31st May. She said we left, we arrived 17th June, in Lyon. I know what she means. Now I remember. We were from 2nd to the 4th June, in Pilsen, and we left, we arrived in Lyon on 4th June, and stayed for two weeks in the hospital of La Croix Rousse till 17th June, and we left on 17th June, the hospital, for St. Etienne, that's how it worked. In between there is one day when we must have been on the journey from Theresienstadt, when we left Theresienstadt on 31st May, we were in a truck, and overnight, we must have slept in that castle which was a hospital, where they gave us a change of clothing again, and took us on to Pilsen. In Pilsen, we only stayed a short time because they wanted to get us moving, the ones who could be transported, we were taken to the airport in Pilsen, put on a train, on a plane, and taken to Lyon, and I remember quite clearly that we arrived about the same time, you know, we arrived on 3rd June '44, in Birkenau, and we arrived about the same time back in France again.

When were you transferred from Russian control to American?

Only in Pilsen. You see, the Russians, the Russians put us on, that's right, the Russians put us, the way we were still dressed, in the Concentration Camp uniform, the striped one, on lorries, and these lorries took us to the hospital. In

the hospital they washed us, gave us fresh clothing, and the Americans gave us some kind of blue uniform, you know, something to change over, and we arrived in Pilsen in this kind of blue uniform, you know, like a salopette, or something. We were not given any different clothing after that. We arrived in Lyon still dressed like that. But in any case, they took everything away from us.

End of F145 Side A

F145 Side B

In Auschwitz, we said that, "If any of us will survive, we should all meet again in St. Etienne", because originally we came from Lorraine, but we said that the best way would be to meet again in St. Etienne. Therefore, we all, we thought, when we arrived in Lyon, right away, the enquiries we made was for St. Etienne. I think I have already told you about the hospital, it's already on the tape, isn't it?

With the German nurses?

No. We are now in Lyon, in La Croix Rousse, in the Hospital Croix Rousse.

About your first meal there?

Yes.

Yes.

Yes, and we were looked after in the Hospital. Yes, yes, yes. So I think, and I think I told you about, that we made enquiries, you know, we tried to find out if anybody had returned from, in St. Etienne. I think I told you that the aunts came to see Janine, and we asked if anybody was alive, and who was coming back, and had they heard of anybody who came back, and so on and so forth. Well, by now, we are out of the hospital, and we go to St. Etienne. Well, in St. Etienne, there was an Organisation, there was a young couple who were in charge, to receive the survivors, whoever came back. We couldn't stay in St. Etienne, because we had nowhere to stay, so we were assembled, we were, I think 20 or 25 young people, who were, some were from Metz, some were from St. Etienne, you know, they all assembled in St. Etienne, although they came from Alsace Lorraine, because they all had arranged to meet in St. Etienne. The, is it

the American Joint? Was it? I think the money came from the American Joint, came from America. They arranged to take over a house, a kind of pension in Chambon-sur-Lignon, because we were still very weak, we needed to have a long convalescence, we were looked after by a doctor, we went there on 5th July, it means that between 17th June till 5th July, we must have stayed somewhere. I now remember. I remember that when we left the Hospital, we went to Janine's relations, the Judge Neher, I think I mentioned it before, and we stayed there a few days, and they were very kind to us, but we still couldn't eat very much and we couldn't sleep in beds, it was terrible, it was still the same problem, and Janine now had to decide what to do, because she had lost her mother, father and sister, what she had left were aunts, and uncles and cousins, so she, she decided that she will take, she will take a convalescence with us in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, but I cannot remember exactly how many days what we had at St. Etienne, in St. Etienne, because there is this discrepancy of a few days, she must have been sleeping somewhere, probably in a hotel, or a pension, or somewhere, because when we arrived back, but on 5th July, we went to Chambon-sur-Lignon, and we stayed there till 4th September. It makes it July, August, 2\ months, where we were well-treated, we got food, we got doctors looking after us, we got some clothing, and a little bit of money, I suppose spending money, and we went for, we had a leader, always with us, you know, to cheer us up, to start, to be with us, to take us for excursions, to give us concerts, to teach us dancing, you know, to bring us back a little bit.

Who was your leader?

I forgot his name. Unfortunately, he was our leader, and I heard several years later that he committed suicide, and his wife and child.

All three of them?

Yes. Yes.

They were French Jews?

Yes. Yes. Not deported, but unfortunately, I heard it - I was already living in England. He was awfully nice, he took good care, because after we had had our convalescing, as I said, everybody wondered what we would do afterwards, how we would start a new life again, so the, this young man, he found us a little apartment, which was not expensive, because we hadn't, no money, he found us, the furniture came from the Joint, each got a bed, a mattress, some covers, some sheets, a little bit of crockery, and we thought that the first thing we would do, we would go back to where we used to live in Sarreguemines, and see if we could recover anything, you know, from our home, or whether anything was, even also to try and recover, we had left some goods, or my father had left some goods with some French people in Blâmont, and during the War, when were in dire need of money, we wrote to this good lady, she was an old lady with a daughter, who was also very old by now, and we asked her, "Please, can't you send us, you know, a few watches or something, so that we can sell them and make a little money to live on." And she said, "Please don't write", she said, "if they know that we are hiding Jewish goods, you know, we will be arrested." So we didn't write any more, but she kept the goods, and after, when we went up to Blâmont, she gave us everything which was left, we were not very good business people by that time, I suppose we sold them quite cheap, but we needed immediately money, because we had no money. We went to Sarreguemines, we recovered some of the furniture that, that our good neighbours had taken, you know, when we were not there any more, carpets and furniture. We recovered it, and we took it back, and we put it in this little apartment.

Were they happy to return your things?

I don't think they were happy. They couldn't help themselves, they had a little bit of shameful face, you know, when we said, "This looks like ours. This looks like ours." So they returned it to us, not all, but some, some we recovered, but it was also more of a sentimental thing for us, you know, that we should think it belonged to our home, and we put it back in our own home, so it brought back memories.

What about the house itself?

It was bombed, also, but they had taken these things out before, so they saved a few things. The house in Sarreguemines was bombed, the flat in St. Etienne was bombed, so really and truly, it was very difficult to recover anything any more. So as I explained before, when we were in St. Etienne, to say that we had recovered, we had put on a lot of pounds, which was actually all fat, and the doctors agreed that this was no good at all, you know, we have to come, and we have to take gymnastic lessons, we have to have special massages, we still had diarrhoea, we still have great trouble with the intestines and eating, and we were still very weak. When we ate a meal, we would perspire, you know, water would drop, you know, we couldn't eat, you know, it was such an effort. That took a long time, that took some time. The trouble was that we wanted to start again to do something. We were, none of us, qualified, none of us. My brother was supposed to go to Paris to continue his studies, and he decided to get married, and gave up his place. My other brother, Armand, he did go and study in Paris, he took up his place, to study pattern cutting, and by now, I had set up home, you know, I had set up home, and I was the one who kept the home. So my brother said, "With the money that we had sold the clocks, watches, and things like that", he said, "Maybe we

should go into something else, because, perhaps we should go, and go into cutlery, because we were very near Thiers," so we said, "Maybe that's an idea, we start, buy and sell", cos my father had a name as a businessman, so we had some kind of credit. So we started to buy and sell cutlery to shops, not retail, to the stores, and I did it with him, till he got married. He wasn't married then. Till he got married. Once Janine decided to come, she was very unhappy in Alsace, because she couldn't settle. There there was a normal family, and she had lost all her own. She couldn't accept it. The only person that was for her, that had a meaning for her, was my brother. Therefore, she wanted to get married. She was prepared to do any job while he would be studying, but she wanted to get married. And my brother, he was too proud, you know, he said, "I cannot let her work and I study", and therefore he got married. I don't know to this day if he has no regrets, because he was a brilliant student, you know, and he could have done very well. But he has done all right now, but he regrets that he didn't have a chance to continue.

What was he supposed to study?

Haute Études Commerciales.

One of the finest Universities of France, he had a place, everything paid, everything, he would have had everything paid, and been looked after through his studies. And he didn't take it up at the last minute, because Janine wanted to get married. There you are, it was a love match, and that was the case. They got married, and they had right away, a child, although the doctors begged her, "If you get married, please don't have any children for the next four years." The first two years she had one child after the other, and it was a bit early they thought, but she has lovely children, very nice children.

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Say something about the reunion with your brothers, how you found each other, and what you said to each other.

Yes, it's, I can only remember that my brother Armand came, he was the first one to come, because he was Liberated, and he was in St. Etienne, so he came to the Hospital, at the Croix Rousse, but he was not allowed to come up. So you can imagine, when I saw him, he looked very fat, but very grey, he looked very sick, he didn't look well. And, of course, you can imagine, we all cried, we all cried, you know, we could see, we asked, "Have you heard any more?" He said, "I think I heard that David is being treated in the Hotel Lutecia in Paris," which was changed into a hospital, by the Americans, and, "I am going to Paris to tell David that you are in Lyon, alive." So the only thing, the first reaction of his was, "Freda, you have no hair!" "You just have 1 cm. of hair, but that's growing back a little bit." And there was joy, and there was sadness, because there were still three missing. As much as you didn't want to, you knew what was happening, but in your heart, you didn't want to admit to, admit it. I always had great hopes for my little brother, if sometimes I saw a few little children, and we looked and looked, and we read, and we searched, and for years we searched, even when I went to the big gathering, we still searched, you know, because there were people that were called similarly, because his name was Marcel, but his Jewish name was Moshe, so we didn't know if somebody put him in under Maurice, Moshe or Marcel, you know, you never know, so we always search for him. My brother David, it took him quite a few days. It was a very strange feeling, you know, you, there were three different people coming home, really, after having gone through, you were three different people. Nobody talked, and as I mentioned before, we were one of hundreds of orphans by now, we were bigger orphans, but there were tiny orphans too, like I told you, Janine's family, the Neher's, you know, the son there took over a whole Orphanage, where there were

hundreds of orphans, little tiny ones, we cried our eyes out when we saw these little orphans since then. We were happy to see them, but we knew what they did to their parents, tiny ones, three years, two years, four years, hundreds of them, you know. And there were some marvellous people around, you know, who looked after them, and tried to place them in Jewish families. Then you had to recover all the children, you had to search for children that were with non-Jews, you see, hidden children, so it was still a very traumatic time when we came back. You asked me what happened to the non-Jewish population, whether they did for us, the French. I only remember that I had a friend that was with me on holiday, I told you, I went on holiday against my father's wish, and my false identity, she gave me a little jacket to wear. I cannot remember any other French person doing anything for us otherwise. It was purely, these people who took on the task. Our Jewish people who had not been deported, they couldn't talk to us, they felt embarrassed, and we felt embarrassed, it was a very strange feeling. You felt bad because you were a survivor, they felt bad because we were survivors. There was a strange feeling. We had nothing in common either. We were happy for the ones that were saved, but we couldn't tell our miseries to these people, Jewish people, either. They only looked at us and cried, you know, they couldn't talk, and we couldn't talk. So what did we do? We remained with our own little people, that had suffered the same fate, and we tried to sort out our lives really, for a long time. When my, when my brother eventually got married in '46, quite soon, I didn't think that there was room for me after that. I stayed with a wonderful family, the Grumbachs. They were the, the owners and the people that run the newspaper, 'La Tribune'. He was Jewish, she was half-Jewish, her name was, her name was Soulier, she had a brother who was a senator, they lived in a very beautiful villa that belonged to the brother-in-law, who now was in Paris, he was a Director of 'Match', the journal, and they

offered us, before we had, I think we had, I think they offered us, even when we had a flat, but we were not settled, we stayed with them for several months. They offered us hospitality, we had, it was a beautiful villa with antique furniture, it was very luxurious, and food and everything, and we are still friendly with them today, whoever is still alive, and they came to my wedding, when I got married in England, they came over. They were just wonderful to us. One other, I must say, one other French family, once invited us for lunch, otherwise nothing came forthwith from the French people really. I don't think anybody else had different experience. I already knew Madame Frey, the one who remained friendly over the years, who had the two nieces who were Kapos, I remained, I became very friendly with Madame Frey, whose husband had been shot in 1942, he was a Polish Jew, or a Czech Jew. They had taken him in '42, and she heard they'd shot him. And Madame Frey told me her story of her family, who live in Bratislava, who were hidden in a bunker, and a baby cried, there were 72 people, and they shot them all. Madame Frey was one of those amazing women, that I miss so much. I always, since I lost my mother, I always look for a mother figure everywhere, it's true, I've always one person that is a mother figure, maybe I shouldn't need it any more, but this may be because it happened the way it happened. So Madame Frey, who lived still in Paris, when Paris was Occupied, and she brought her children over in the locomotive, of a train, hidden under the coals. The locomotive was, the engine was stopped by the Germans, and they were even raking in the coals, and they got through to St. Etienne, they were not French, they were, they had no papers, you know, no nationality. They arrived in St. Etienne, she was, her profession was a corsetière, a first class corsetière, you know, in those days people wore corsets, you know, fine underwear, and she was a very good person for that. So she used to work at making underwear for people, and with that money, she hid her two sons in a

school, 'laique', you know, a Christian school, where the priest hid the two sons.

Like in the film?

Au Revoir Les Enfants. He even let them, to say their prayers every morning, in his study. And she hid from one place, slept every night somewhere else, and that's how they survived the War.

The boys survived?

Yes. And I'm still very friendly, we are like brothers and sisters. Madame Frey was one of these ladies who could cope with anything and everything. She opened her house to whoever needed a meal, there were a few of us that were always without a home, or without a meal, you understand? In her house, there was always to eat for all of us. If there was a Shabbat, or a holiday, or a Yomtov she invited everybody for a meal. She made sure that nobody went without. Eventually, she returned to Paris, because her apartment had also been taken over by the French, and she had to get out, and she moved back to her own apartment. As I mentioned, she was a first class corsetiere. By that time, I had to find again, something to do. She said to me, "Why wouldn't you work for me? I will start, I think, to manufacture, corsetry. And if you can provide," I had to find the material, and then I had to sell the finished article. And that's what I did for a few years, and I lived in Paris, I had found a lodgings with a lovely Jewish lady, an old lady, who must have been once very well-to-do, and today she needed to let a room, and so on. I bought some of her silver there, as a young girl, from her, because she needed money, and she had bought that silver in Brighton, you know, when they used to come on holiday to Brighton, she used to love English silver. But I lived there, I travelled a lot, and I managed to earn my living, to look after

myself, to be independent. I also had a, a very nice time in Paris. I went back, I went to the theatre, I went to the cinema, you know, I again started to live. You still were troubled by the nightmares, and everybody round you had suffered, but you know, nobody spoke about it. Everybody tried not to speak about it, it was too painful. Everybody wanted to know how are you getting on? Never mind, because you mustn't forget that nobody really wanted to know how you, how you were. People really found all that too embarrassing, and too painful. You right away had to show that you can manage. How, it was very difficult, but you had to. So I did the best I could, in the circumstances, and I knew I could always go back, I was always with Madame Frey, in other words, she was an intelligent woman, if I needed advice, if I needed something, I also met people that came from Russia, who, through France, and on to America, who are doing today, very very well. But I think I didn't tell you that immediately, before I started to work for Madame Frey, there were still a lot of problems with people coming through France, and going on to Paris, and on to America, or away from, I remember being asked to go ...

End of F145 Side B

F146 Side A

So I was sent, I was sent to Sarreguemines to meet people that were coming from Hungary, and helped them to get their papers, to go on to, to Paris and from Paris to America.

Who sent you?

It must have been an Organisation that sent me, because I can't remember exactly, but I know I was sent to Sarreguemines to meet people, I don't know how many there were, a group of people, who were arriving in Sarreguemines, and I probably had papers for them, and send them on. I was so, why was I impressed as a young girl? Because the Hungarians you, say you shake hands, they kiss your hand! Everybody, you know, was kissing your hand, as we greeted them at the station. But there were people that were on their way out, and probably on their way to America. There I probably stayed with my friend, Professor Weil, you see, because he lived in Sarreguemines already, he went back, his wife and children were murdered. At that time, he had married the sister, already, he had married the sister. But also we only, we only looked at each other, and never spoke, never spoke, never. And if he could help me, he would help me, or phone, you know, because I could stay overnight with them, or, and we could discuss things, but otherwise we never spoke about our experiences at all.

Did that seem strange to you at the time? Did it feel strange?

Not to speak? No. No. It was just too painful, just too painful, even today, I mean, it is painful, I mean, we have now, as I said before, I, I try and remain, even now, on a certain level, you know, I don't want to get too emotional because otherwise I won't be able to speak to you, you understand? If I would speak from the heart, I couldn't

speaking to you, I have to take it a little bit on a certain level, so I can tell you, because I feel I must tell you. It's still very hard. Where are we? We are now in Paris with Madame Frey, we are working, we are enjoying ourselves too. I remember, when we, all three of us, we were so naive, my brothers and I, we said, "We are going from St. Etienne to Paris, and from Paris to Sarreguemines to see what we could recover. We arrive in Paris, and the Americans were there. The American Army was there, you know, the Army, Military Police was everywhere wasn't it. And we must have looked like real greens, because they always ask us if we would buy any watches. They used to have watches from here till here, you know! To sell. And really, we had no money to buy watches, but they seemed to be, you have taken over the city of Paris, and they were everywhere, so we were trying to find a room to sleep, and eventually we found, we could afford just one room for the three of us. We found a room in Paris, and on the Champs Elysses, in a small hotel, and I don't think we had much luggage, we must have had one little bag for the three of us. We left it, and we wanted to see Paris. So we went out, but we were, you know, being so naive as we were, we came back, and there was somebody else sleeping in our bedroom, we were horrified, you know. The woman was letting these rooms, you know, probably while the people were out! So we said to the proprietienne (?), , "We are not going to sleep in these beds, you know, you'd better change the sheets. We are not sleeping here." But there was, everywhere was taken, and we had to sleep somewhere, so she changed the sheets, and she let us sleep there. But for us, you know, we were really provincial, I must say, not really provincial but we were far too young, and the War broke out, and we had no experience, so we were really, couldn't understand what was happening in the City! But we left the following day for Sarreguemines, so it was all right. But you looked, you wanted, you, I think there is a feeling to be free again, do you know? Often, often I try

to remind myself what it means to be free, to do what you like. To, to be free, to speak, to just be free, you know, nobody knows what that word freedom really means, until you have been incarcerated the way we were. And often when I think of the Prisoners of Conscience, in Russia, and in other countries, I know exactly what they feel, I know what they're going through. When they clip your wings, and they put you in a cell, and they don't give you a bed, and they don't give you any facilities, what that means. They bring you right down to nothing, you know, they take everything away of the human being, of the human dignity. You are no, you are nothing, you are not even an animal, because an animal would be given a little of straw, and something of water, and I still feel it, I still feel that. And for me to be free, when I go out and walk, I often remind myself, "You know, you are really free, you are really free." And I think that's why, from time to time, I have this craziness, I must be free, I must do what I like, when I like, how I like, I must be left to do what I want. It's like when you have clipped the wings of a bird, and taken everything away, after that, you don't want it any more. And for one year, we didn't see a tree, nor hear a bird, or see anything that was nice, so this is now, I don't want to be deprived, now I don't want to be deprived any more. And if anybody wants to deprive me of anything, I get wild. And I have another thing which always, is still with me. I cannot bear anybody too near me. Let's say, I'm very glad now that in Banks, and in Post Offices, they have a line, you know, where people have to queue, next person. If I feel anybody on top of me, you know, too near me, I, I get very nervous, I cannot bear that any more. It's because we were always so pushed together. Naked together, you know, on top of each other, and now I cannot bear it any longer. I must have room, you know? I must have space. But these are the little leftovers, but they're there, they are there. And it's understandable, but it doesn't leave you, it doesn't leave you. It doesn't leave you at all. When I, when I go

in a lift, or in a, in a underground where I am being pushed about, it makes me very nervous, it makes me very nervous, I can't take it any longer. So now we have done Paris. As I said, I had, I was there from '47 to 1950, in Paris, where I worked, I travelled, I earned my living, I met some wonderful people. There were many people who today, are very high up, are very very rich, but these were the days when they came and they were not in these positions, and I have one family in particular, I don't want to mention the name, because they're very high up today, in Paris, but when they arrived, they lived like everybody else, you know, in several hotel rooms together, and they cooked and everything, and tried to keep the family together, till they could take a big apartment and get settled. They couldn't speak French, so we used to help each other, you know, I used to go out with them, and buy things, and when a child was born, I went with the father to register the baby, and we saw them grow, and wax very rich, they're very wealthy today, and there are several of them, they started, like everybody else had to start, but they made it, you know, they made it, and they made lives for themselves. And Madame Frey's sons, you know, who had also very hard beginning, when they came back, they, they started to study, she made them study, but they ended up in the diamond trade, but they studied, both had qualifications. She only died a few years ago, and she is buried in Israel, the Mount of Olives, that's where she wanted to be buried, yes. When I go now, I go quite often to Paris, I have my family. It isn't Paris any more, the same without Madame Frey. She was my, she was the person that, that would say, "You have to dress and you have to look after yourself, you know, I think you should do this", I could go for advice, you know, and she meant it well, she meant it very well. She was only sorry that I didn't marry in France, because I had occasions when I could have married in France. And after I lost my husband, she said, "I don't know why you went to England, you know, you could have very well settled in France." But

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you know, you never know how your destiny, what happens to you, how your life will turn, how did I know it will happen that way? So, when I look back, I think maybe I should have listened to her! But there you are, I didn't. I didn't. As I told you before, in 1948, I must have come to England to visit relations here, and I had their address through my aunt from Israel, who said, "There are some relations in England." So I came to England for a few weeks, spent a few weeks in England, returned to France, came back in '49 for another holiday, a short holiday, and there I, there I met my husband. I mean, I met, by coincidence, it happened, I think I explained to you, we were somehow related, not very near related, but we were related, and he was, he was going to Israel on business, and I was returning to France, it was already September. I had come probably in the middle of August, and this was September, beginning of September, and I went to Synagogue, not that I am a regular Synagogue goer, but I went to Synagogue, and walking back in Hampstead Garden Suburb, my relation said, "I think you should meet some other relations of yours, although they're not directly related", but my late mother-in-law knew my relations well from Poland on my father's side. So I, I met the family, and we had a little talk, and that was it. I think we went in to Kiddush, and then I went home, and then, that's how it started. The romance. My husband, David Wineman, rang me up, he made a date, I think he wrote it all down for me at one stage, I should remember! I think I went out the first time, on 10th September, and I will always remember, because we went to see a film which I liked very much, we went to see The Third Man, with Orson Welles, have you seen it? Very good film. My husband used to have a factory in Kent, therefore he was not in town every day. He always was in town only weekends. When he came down again, we must have been out only three times, when he asked me to marry him. It was a very quick romance! We were actually engaged six weeks later, where my family made an engagement party, and I returned to France. I was quite sure, in those days, that

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he was the right person for me. He was very gentle, he was very nice, he was older than me, but that was the strange thing, I couldn't marry anybody of my age, because I had matured too fast, and anybody of my age group, unless I would have married somebody that had gone through the same thing, they will be probably different, but somebody else was very young in comparison. I didn't know the family really very well, because I only met them a few times over a meal, or a cup of tea, I didn't meet them. But I had no doubts. My husband fell in love at first sight! And I, I think, I fell in love in a certain way too, you know. I think he was wonderful. I was a little bit nervous to leave France, my English was school English, you know, was far from being good. But he knew French, he was born in Lucerne, and he spoke French too, so we could converse in French

Was his French good?

Yes. So we, I went back to France, and I decided to stay in France as long as possible, I had everything that I needed done in Paris, making the wedding dress, everything. And I came back four days before the wedding. So the family arranged a very nice wedding. I didn't ask for a big wedding, they wanted a big wedding, biggish wedding, and for me it was a happy and a sad occasion, you see, it was, there was only my two brothers, the relations that lived in England, but I made my mind up that I will not cry on my wedding, and do you know, when my daughters got married, I said, "I will not cry at your weddings either." Because when I was all dressed up as a bride, and the family had made a little Kidush for people to come in to see the bride, as customary in England. The sisters came in, crying bitterly, and this is supposed to be my happiest day of my life! And I wasn't going to cry. I was getting married. My heart was sad I didn't have my parents, but I wasn't going to cry.

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So his sisters were crying?

Yes.

Why?

I don't know, maybe it's customary to cry. I had the impression that they were a little jealous, I was a lot younger than them. I was 14 years younger than my husband, but I was 17 and 20 years younger than the sisters, you know, and I was young, and I was lively, and I was French in my manner, much more open, much more ... quite different in spirit, and being very young you said to yourself, "Well, you know, I'm really not marrying the whole family, I'm just marrying David Wineman", don't you, mmm? The reality is different. Well, after the wedding we went on honeymoon, and we went to Italy, to San Remo and to Nice, and that was lovely, because we were away, we were free, we could do what we liked, that was lovely. And my husband, we went to live in Rochester in Kent, where actually the factory was, and we had only a provisional flat at the time, because my husband didn't know how I would settle in Rochester. Coming from Paris, it wasn't exactly the place for me. The apartment was really the lodge for the nightwatchman, or for the porter, you know, for the factory, and we were going to buy a house, so for the moment we had taken over this apartment, till we found a house, or we said, for a few years in Rochester or Chatham, so that my husband didn't have to travel such a lot.

What kind of factory?

Lamp manufacture, machines and electric bulbs, so the only redeeming feature of that apartment was that it was, the River Medway was in front, and the castle, Rochester Castle was facing me, you know, it was very romantic, the view, otherwise there was absolutely nothing, I didn't know

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anybody, and I felt completely cut off. The first thing my husband said, "Maybe we should keep you occupied, we get an English coach in, a teacher." So I must have had a few lessons, I had a few lessons in English, and some in, in literature, not very long, for a little while. And then I was pregnant and I couldn't bear having lessons, I didn't feel well enough. Weekends we used to come to London, every weekend, to stay with the family. They had a very big house in Bishops Avenue. I cannot say that I was happy there. I didn't feel that good. I tried to feel good, but I didn't. I didn't. My husband came from a family, being the youngest of a family, he was treated like a prince, you know, he was the youngest, he was the breadwinner, he was in an old-fashioned set-up, where he was entitled to do nothing, except sit and be served and looked after. But when in Rochester, he behaved quite normally, but he wanted to please his family, so he behaved the way they wanted. The weekends we used to go there, and then every weekend in the beginning and then I said it was too much. It was too much to always uproot yourself every Friday morning and return every Monday morning, and then start all over again, I didn't like it, so we did it every two weeks, average. Sandra was born one year later, in 1951, and we continued to do this, backwards and forwards. One sister, in particular, was very difficult, and very, she had no children, she was by now a widow, and I had nothing in common. I really had nothing in common. Although they were very very comfortable, or rich people, even, they worked very very hard. They didn't spare their efforts or time, they believed in hard work, and saving. I always considered that they hadn't long to live, and they were very very hurtful at times, because due to the circumstances, I had no money, no fortune, I brought whatever I could, you know, in clothing, but I had no money, I didn't bring money, and they always thought of their brother, being who he was, should have married a person with money. I was also, although I came from an orthodox background, I was not religious enough

in their eyes. They didn't trust me with my religion. Thirdly, they couldn't understand why other Jews could save themselves, and we hadn't saved ourselves. And I tried to explain that 6 million Jews didn't save themselves, or had they any idea what it meant to live in an Occupied country? They lived in a very luxurious house in Denham, and they made lots of money during the War because they worked for the Army, there was no shortage of food or anything. They couldn't understand what it meant to live the way we used to live during the War, in fear, you had, London had bombs, they had bombardment, they had War, like that, and they had to live with restrictions in food, I understand, but not to be compared with what happened on the Continent. And certainly not to be compared with people who were deported. They made no concessions, or they didn't have no consideration for anybody that went through all that. The old mother, she was already a very old lady, the only good point I can say in her favour, was that I think that she wouldn't have been so bad, if she wouldn't have been so frightened of her children. She was, she had now to rely on her children to look after her. But she was a very hard woman. She loved her son's children, I am already going too far. But you know, she told me, she told me that she knew my great grandparents, she knew my father, she knew the whole family, she lived next door, she, she told me all the names, she described me, I didn't know anything. I knew we had pictures of the family, but I didn't know anything, she told me. Well, I soon was expecting a second child, not that I wanted one so quickly, but I seemed to be pregnant very fast, one after the other, and probably physically I wasn't that well, because I had very bad pregnancies. When I was pregnant in the sixth month, I nearly lost Irene, I broke the waters, and we were supposed to go to France on a holiday, because my husband understood that I needed to go back every so often to France, you know, I missed it, and he was prepared to take me to France on holidays ...

End of F146 Side A

F146 Side B

... but I was taken to hospital, they were nearly sure I would lose Irene, but thank God I didn't, and he said I should rest a lot, and I mustn't travel. Therefore, we went to Torquay on a holiday, by car, took it very easy, we took the lady, unfortunately that I'm going to the funeral to, with us, Mrs. Jermamy, who was a very devoted person, so that I should rest and she will look after Sandra, and my husband had a wonderful holiday, a wonderful rest. He said he never had such a wonderful rest, because I had to rest, we had good weather, good food, and we weren't doing anything. We stayed two weeks. My husband looked the picture of health. We returned to Rochester, and it was a very hot summer, 1951, '52, and my husband said, "You know, I'm not feeling well", he said, "send me over some ice water," to the factory, because we were next door. That evening when he came home, he said, "I still don't feel right, I don't know, I must have eaten something." And during the night, he was sick, and he sicked something which looked brown, so I said, "We'd better ask the doctor." He said, "We don't have to ask the doctor, I'm all right. You will see, in the morning, I will be all right." Well, eventually, we did call the doctor, and he thought that he had done perhaps something to the oesophegus. He wasn't getting better, he was ill, and he wanted to go back to the factory, he always thought the factory couldn't run without him, because he was the Director, and Engineer, and everything in the factory, so he decided, he said, "You know, I think you should see somebody in London, a specialist." And the specialist decided that he needed some investigations, and in end of August/September, Irene was due in September, and they asked him to come into hospital for tests and investigation, to the London Hospital, and they looked and looked, and they said, "There is something wrong with his liver." And they called another big specialist, they called, at the time, Sir Horace Evans, who

was a great physician, and he is the only one who diagnosed hepatitis. My husband didn't drink. To this day, they thought he must have caught it, because he travelled to Greece, to Israel, I don't know, he travelled a lot, for his business, he travelled a lot. He looked so well that nobody believed he could be sick. I was in the ninth month, expecting Irene. I was, I had, because I had lost the waters, the child was lying on my legs, and I was running everyday, in the Underground, to the London Hospital, and my husband was crying, because he knew I could have the child in the Underground, he was so worried, and the doctor said to me, "I think when you will have the baby, it will be easier for your husband." It was a terrible time, because I had Sandra staying with my in-laws, who was about 20 months, and I was expected Irene, another baby. If I tell you I sometimes stood at the Underground Station, East Finchley, and I cried, and I cried and I cried, with a tummy liked that, and people must have wondered what is the matter with me. I knew I had a husband who was desperately ill, I was staying with in-laws that were so hard to me, I had no support from any side. And when I arrived in the Hospital I had to pretend everything was okay. Well, it was, I always remember, it was the eve of Rosh Hashana, and I cried from the Hospital till I arrived home with a little bunch of flowers for Rosh Hashana. And I was heartbroken. I could see my husband was very very ill, but I certainly was the last one to admit that he wouldn't live. I was expecting another child. We hadn't even started our lives. Everything was just provision. And here I was, two days later, she was born, I was taken to the Hospital, the St. Elizabeth, the St. John and Elizabeth Hospital where I'd been before, because I nearly lost Irene. And my husband was in hospital in the East End, Aldgate, and I had a very hard time, because I was not feeling very well in the circumstances. But she was born, a lovely baby, weighing 7lb 2oz. and I was the one that rang up my husband in the hospital, telling him "It's a girl." He said, "Well,

because I wasn't there, you took the wrong sack, it was to be a boy!" Anyway, he was delighted that the child was all right. And I didn't see him, they kept for two weeks in hospital, because I was not well. So my husband was in hospital, I was in hospital. There was nobody to make a fuss of me. Little Sandra came from time to time, didn't know what I was doing, and Sandra came to hospital to wonder what I was doing in hospital, instead of being home. When I came home with the baby, we had, we had ordered, we'd asked, not ordered, I'd said, "With the first child it was very difficult", I said, "With the second child I would like to have a Nanny to train the baby to sleep and to eat, and to have a peaceful time, because Sandra wouldn't sleep." The Nanny, or the Nurse, came, and the family was against it. The family didn't see why I should have a nurse. Number one. And why we should pay a nurse to look after the babies when I can do it myself. But I said, "I like to go and see David in hospital." They said, "You don't have to. We go." That is the reason why I wasn't there when my husband died. There was no way they would take over the children. And that is only the beginning of their behaviour.

Did you see him after the baby was born, at all?

Well, I think I missed out a little bit. What happened, when he, the baby was born, I missed out that. When the baby was born, he came home for two weeks, he came home for two weeks, and he saw Irene for two weeks, and he was very weak, and the doctors used to come regularly, and he said, he kept saying all the time, you know, "I mustn't be sick again." He knew that. And then he was, he got sick one evening, and he was taken by ambulance to the hospital, back to the hospital, and he must have lived another two or three days. And he died on 7th November, and Irene, you know, because of the times I was going through, my milk was like water, so the child was crying day and night, and it was

hell, it was just hell, can you imagine? It was just hell, it was just hell. . He died on a Friday, 7th November, 1952, and here I was in Sunningdale, in a big house, everybody mourning their brother, not so much us. Completely ignoring that little Irene because she was born at a time like that. And I completely heartbroken. My world had collapsed for good. They were so nasty to the nurse that she said, "If I am staying a few days, it's only because of you, but I don't want to stay a day longer."

So you did get a nurse?

Yes. And she stayed only a few days, because she wouldn't stay longer. She said, she said, "Maybe you went through Auschwitz, but this was another Auschwitz for me. I am not going to go and work for Jews any more." But I can assure you, by that time, my husband had died, he hadn't made a Will, I had no money in my own name, I had been pregnant for two years, I had no clothes that fitted me, and they didn't pay any wages from the minute he was ill, and when he died, they cut it off. And he was the Director of the Company. They say, "How do you expect wages? David is dead."

Wages to the workers?

No, to him, his, his, his pay, David's pay, as a Director.

The family ran the factory?

The two brothers owned the factory. He was cut off the pay list, the minute that he had died, and he was a Director, he was the owner, one of the owners.

What did they expect you to do?

So, they gave me a few pounds, you know, £10, you know, whenever they thought about it, till it went through the, it

had to be, you know, he had private money, but everything was frozen, the minute he died, everything was frozen. You see, since that date, since this happened to me, in those days a lot of people were superstitious, they didn't make Wills. So many people after that when they heard what happened to me, the only thing, when we were sitting Shiva, the family admitted it was a love match, you know. But they cut us completely off.

You continued to live in the house with the children?

For eight months, because we, I said I wanted to go back to, we had bought, in the meantime, before my husband was taken ill, we had bought a house in Chatham, where we were going to move, at least for five years. A nice house, five bedrooms, you know, nice garden, in a residential district, and we were going to move then. We had already the builders in to do at least the bedrooms, so that my husband when he comes back, he can at least have a nice bedroom to, you know, while he was ill, and so that we could move, but as he never got better, we never, the minute I said, "I cannot live in that flat, it's two miles from anywhere." The first thing they did, they took the car away, they said, "It's a Company car, you can't keep it." So I had two prams, I lived two miles away from everywhere, I couldn't move to the house, so they said, "You'd better stay here." Even at one point, I would like to mention it in there, at one point, my very famous, not famous, one sister-in-law called Bertha, said to me, "Why don't you go back to St. Etienne and leave us the children?" So ... For eight months I suffered there. After David died, the family decided that they needed to go for a rest to Bournemouth, because they had suffered the loss of their brother. They left me in charge of that 13-room house, by myself, with the two little ones, with no help, and they needed a break! They immediately realised that I was in a mental state that I can, I could not think straight, or lucid, you know. I had no financial

adviser, I had no legal adviser, I didn't have a friend in this world. The first thing they made me sign, there was an Accountant, who was my husband's best friend, there was a lawyer who was my husband's best friend. The first thing they made me sign is to give up the Directorship of my husband, so they didn't have to pay me fees any more. You see, I sit there with two little babies screaming, in these surroundings, after six months of sickness with my husband, I am not really with it. The first thing they did, they made me sign away the Directorship of my husband, so he was not any more on the list of Directors, and they didn't have to pay him wages any more.

That was before he died?

No. After he died. Immediately after. And the lawyers take, you know, till you make all the, you have to pay, the first thing you have to pay, you have to pay the Government, you have to pay death duty, these are the first people that want their money. It took over a year till I got £1,000, that's all what I was entitled to, as the widow, and that took one year. In the meantime, after eight months I couldn't take it any longer. I said, "I don't care, I want a car, I want a car to take me back to Rochester." I got back to the flat, I couldn't take it. When the doctor saw me, and that had looked after my husband in Rochester, he looked at me, he didn't recognise me any more. I looked like an old woman. I had aged, I had crumbled. I was in a state of depression, and there wasn't anybody to help me. The only person was Mrs. Jermany. She came to me, and she said, "Mrs. Wineman, I had a dream last night. Mr. Wineman asked me to look after you." It could snow, ice, rain, whatever, 9 o'clock in the morning, she was there. She never let me down. She loved those children, she looked after them. She helped me, she was a wonderful person. Then I had also some friends that I knew when my husband was still alive, called Feingold, Mr. and Mrs. Feingold. They

rang every week to find out how I was. My brother came over, David, he came over to Rochester, to see what I can do. But you see, he gave me advice right in the beginning, to take a lawyer, but I was in their hands, I was staying in Sunningdale, I was staying in their house, how could I go out and find a solicitor? So when I, when I went to Rochester, and the Feinholds phoned up, and they came to see me, they said, "You must take a solicitor. I know of a solicitor, my solicitor. I don't know how wonderful he is, but he is honest." So I went to see him, he took on the case, and when I came back, and my brother-in-law, he passed every night, in a Rolls Royce, you know, he passed once or twice a week, he passed the house. He's supposed to give me £10 a week till I got my money. Sometimes he remembered, sometimes he forgot. And I said, "I've taken a solicitor." Then everything went loose, you know, he went mad, he saw red.

Were you living just from this £10 a week that the family was giving you?

Yes, yes. I had no other money. I had no other money.

And you were paying Mrs. Jermany from this?

Yes, yes. Yes. And Mrs. Jermany I paid from that money, and once their little child* came, their little girl, and these children only talk what they hear at home. She said, "Auntie Freda, why do you have Mrs. Jermany, she costs you money, doesn't she?" That was the only person that came to the house there, I was two miles from everywhere, but people in Rochester came to see me, you know, and I tried to invite people just to come and see me, at least. To tell you the truth, Taffy, for 21 years, I, I made accounts, I lived with accounts, I put every penny down, today I don't want to any more. To bring up my daughters, was such a struggle, that today I want, I don't want it any more, finished. But for

20 years, they made life so hard, so difficult, I had, I paid lawyers enough money, I could have had five houses in those days for the money it cost to fight my case. I wanted to make a deal with them, you know, at one time, which would have been very much against my advantage, because I was going to settle, I said, "Give me £20 a week for life, then I will sign away my rights", you know. He said, "No, how can I tell you I give you £20 for life, if I am not here, who will pay you the £20 a week for life?" And he wouldn't sign it. But they diddled me from the beginning to the end. I was supposed to be a very comfortable lady with my children, we're supposed to be well off. We're not. In the end, we settled for the best thing we could get out of them. They are millionaires, but for 20 years, they let us, they let us live with the tongue out while they lived great lives. Very charitable, giving hundreds of thousands of pounds away, hundred thousand pounds away, you know, big sums of money, big names, and my children, nothing. And they're the children of their brother. They took our money, invested it for their advantage. You know, they could have said, "I let you go into that house, you can't live in there, two miles away with nobody around you." Sometimes,

the daughter of Jo Wineman, interviewee's brother-in-law.

the phone was connected to the factory, sometimes they forgot to connect us, you know, for the weekend, so that I had no, not even a telephone, and I had two babies to bring up, two little babies. And no car.

How long did you stay in Rochester?

I stayed there two years. Then these friends, the Feingolds, were moving into, into a house, and I said, "If you sell your flat, give me first refusal." But what happened, when I was in Sunningdale, I said, "It's no use me going back to Sunningdale, to Rochester now, I would like to buy a house in, in London, for the money that we put in the house in Rochester." So they said, "Number one - the house is not yours. Number two - go and look for a house." I saw, they lived in 13 rooms, and 11 rooms, I was looking here, in Hendon, in houses that were three-bedroom houses, with small kitchens, you know, and small, small everything, for two and a half thousand pounds. Every time I came, and I said, "I've found a house", they said, "It's not your money. You can't spend it. You can't have it." So I was running around, with little, one, you know, Sandra in my arms, I was without a car, you know, running around all this district, in the cold, finding a house. When I came with a house, with a proposition, they said, "You can't have it, it's not your money." So in the end, I decided I go back to Rochester, I can't take it any more. They wouldn't let me use my husband's money: he had his own money. They say, "It isn't in your name." I say, "I don't care, put it in the estate's name, put it in the childrens' name, but let me have a home. Let me not go back to Rochester. I mean, the money is in a house, let me put it in another house." Nothing. No.

What do you think their motive was for being so cruel?

They are very greedy people when it comes to money. They don't part with money, except for themselves. They have diddled their own sister. They haven't helped one brother, who died a poor man. There were only two or three, the one who took a big share who had no right on it, a share of our money, you understand, the one who died a few years ago, Bertha, she died leaving a lot of money, it wasn't her money, it was a share of my husband's money, that she must have been given. They took a cake and they shared it in three, you know. It was theirs. Plus all the money we don't know about.

So there were two others who were left out of it, besides you?

Yes.

A brother and a sister?

That were not actually in the business. There were really only two brothers in the business, and one who worked as a wage earner. The other was a housekeeper, but when it came to sharing out the cake, they gave the sister who worked as an employee a big share, and the one that was the housekeeper a big share. But really the two brothers were the owners. I think, number one, I did not bring money, so I was not entitled to any money. And, and they, and they wouldn't, if I would've, I don't know, if I would have, I tried everything. I said, "Give me £20. Just settle." No. And that was a good thing they didn't want to, you understand? It needed big lawyers, big QCs, 20 years of battling. I tell you something, no other woman would have stood the strain of it. But in the meantime, I had to feed my children, I had to educate them, I had to clothe them, if they bought them in the very beginning, clothes, that was very nice, but when they went to Synagogue, and they came out of Synagogue, they would tell everybody, "Look what

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Booba bought them. Look what I bought." Do you understand? They didn't buy quietly, people had to know that they gave the children something. And I didn't like that. If you buy something ...

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My microphone is not working.

Yes, there was a family of, a couple from America, called Portnoy, I think their name is, Portnoy, they were friends of theirs, and they thought maybe they can help us settle our affairs without having to go to Court or anything, and they wanted me to sign something which meant accepting, I think, the £20 per week, or, they wouldn't even accept that, or £20,000 in all, and finish. Just like that. But without having to have to go to Court, without having the Judge's approval, that was a good, the right deal for the children. So I said, "I will never sign anything unless the Court agrees that this is the right settlement for the children." And therefore we didn't get anywhere. One day, in 1965, we already from '52 to '65, we had already incurred enormous bills. It means that when I, I couldn't touch my husband's private money, he had quite a few thousand pounds, I couldn't touch it to live on, I couldn't touch it to buy a house, but I could touch it to pay legal costs. Thousands and thousands and thousands of money in those days. One day, my sister-in-law, Joe Wineman's wife, Deborah, who is supposed to be a saint, asked me to come and have a cup of coffee with her at Lindy's in Golders Green. And I said, "All right." So we went, and we met in Golders Green, and she said, "Why don't you finish, you know, why don't you finish with Joe, why don't you sign these papers, you know, you can get a good deal there, you know, there's so much, £20,000 and so on. Why don't you sign it and finish? Why go on fighting and fighting?" So I explained to her that I cannot sign anything, even if I wanted to. "We are dealing here", I said, "with minors, you have to deal with the Courts, otherwise I will get the reproaches later from my children, 'Why did you do that?' and I don't want it." That was one day. The next day we heard that they had been bought out by Phillips Lamps and were receiving flm. plus

all the rest that goes with the deal. She knew that when she came. So now we had something to work upon. Understand? And for a long long time, the Courts, although my husband was 49% shareholder, and his brother 50%, which means, it means he had one vote more than my husband, although my husband was the first in business, but he was the older one. For a long time, the solicitor, Mr. Fior, so called a good friend of my husband and of the family, he all the time worked for the Wineman side, he never worked on my side. When we went to see him when the children were little, and I was having £10 a week, "No", he said, "Like that, you are entitled to 3/- for Irene and 3/6d. for Sandra, and the difference for you. And I'd like you to keep a record of the money, the way you spend it." Even in 1952/'53/'54, 3/6d. to feed a child was not a lot of money, I can assure you. So she came, and she tried to make me sign something at the 11th hour, while she knew very well, that there was already, for the last four weeks, a deal with Philips that was going through, and she still wanted me to get out of that. The house, Sunningdale, which was a big house in Bishops Avenue, my husband always told me it belonged to him, except for £1,000 that the brother had put in, and £1,000 that the sister had put in. That he, he told me even when we were first married. Because I said, "Why should we always go to Sunningdale, you know, it's your mother's house." He said, "No, no, it's my house. I bought it from my money. But the family lives in it, and I look after, I pay the expenses." So. When he died, they said the house is registered in three names, and they didn't want to admit that David paid for the house and they only put in |1,000. When it came to selling the house, because they said, "Now we are going to sell the house." I said, "If you sell the house, I want you to put a clause in it, that if you sell it for more money than it was bought, I should get the difference." My solicitor wasn't a very careful man in those days, and their solicitor was a very shrewd man, he made me sign that I agreed to sell the house, so the money,

the £4,000 was my share of £12,000 in those days, and the clause was never put in. But I mentioned the clause, I said, "Only under these conditions." I didn't wait for the letter to be written before, you understand? That was part of my, that I, I trusted these people, I still trusted these people that they were not going to do me out of even that. So they thought, they took a house which was sold for a half a million, or a quarter of a million now, a few years ago, and gave me £4,000 for that house, and that's why they're millionaires today, you know. They've diddled me from right, left and centre.

And that's all you ever got out of that house?

Yes.

You should have sued your lawyer.

Yes, I should have sued my lawyer in those days. I was entitled to sue him for the mistakes he made. Well, as I said, the, we came, we only settled really, the Court case, after 20 years, out of Court, not at the 11th hour, but five to twelve. My, my QC which was Mr. Winelot, who today is a judge, he said, "Maybe it's better to accept that kind of amount and he pays the costs." We are now on another big lot. "And", he said, "You can do more with that money now than go on fighting, and go to Court, and get more." Because it was already 20 years after, no, that was '72, we are already in '72. My children are already grown up. They are already at universities, in the meantime.

And then you got a chunk of money.

And then we got a chunk of money which was not mine, which is in Trust for the children.

Nothing for you?

No. Which is in Trust, and I bought this apartment, which is in Trust, and the money is in Trust, I'm only an administrator. But my children, I mean, if I needed money, I would take it, but I am the kind of a woman who wouldn't do it, you know? I try not to. I, I think, I was very pleased that my children at least had the minimum of money to start a home, or to start something. I was very lucky with my children, because Irene, she won a Scholarship from, she won the Woolfson Scholarship, she studied under Anna Freud, she was completely covered for her studies, and by then she had a few pounds of her own, but my other daughter also studied without having to cost me a lot of money, you understand? But they always were nicely dressed, and they never, they never went short.

How did you manage until 1972? What did you live on?

You see, my husband left some money and that money brought very little money. So at one time, Joe Wineman was giving me £20 a week. It means £1200 a year, from the business.

So, where did you live?

In another flat, near the Reform Synagogue in Brentford Lodge.

Did you have to pay rent?

Yes, yes, I had to pay everything, rent, everything. I had no car, I didn't run a car. I paid everything.

Just from the money they were paying you?

Just from that money, yes. That's why I told you, I have always counted, and so now I don't want to count so much.

You never got a job?

I tell you, I had, today when I look back, I think probably I, I got myself perhaps too much, but I never thought it would last so long. When my husband died, there was one thing I said to myself, I said, "Well, I will bring them up religiously, because he wanted that, and he wasn't so sure I would. I will see that they are well brought up, in the religious way." And I said, "I want them to grow up to be normal. To have a normal home life. Not to be deprived, not only of a father, but to be also deprived of a mother." There was no real family background here for us, for them. So they were brought up, but their mother was always at home. I helped them with their homework. I was there when they needed me. I said, "That is the only thing I can give my daughters, they shouldn't grow up with complexes, with problems, and God knows what. "Because", I said, "That was the best thing I could give them." I could give them love, I could give them a warm home, attention, and they should feel that they belong here, they are not short of anything. And I think, on the whole, my daughters are pretty normal too, you know? But the struggle, the struggle was a hard struggle, you know, I could have been more selfish, probably, and done more with my own life. My friends, my friends in France never forgave me. They say, "I can't understand you. Why don't you do something with your life? Why don't you, you were capable before, why aren't you doing something? Why aren't you getting married again? You know, why aren't you doing" I had all, I had so many hang ups in those days, so many hang ups I had, I was afraid I would take somebody in who wouldn't be nice to my children. I had lost everybody I loved, I was afraid to be again hurt. Do you understand, you can hurt a person so much, and then she is afraid. You know, first you take the mother, the father, the brother, and then yourself, and then your husband, and it continues, you are afraid. You want to be loved, you need it as much as anybody else, but how? So I gave it to my children. I did everything for them. Sometimes they feel, sometimes, I think they feel a bit bad

about it, you know, maybe they would have liked me to have done more for myself, but today I try to be independent, you know, not to rely on my children. But now you can understand why it had such an effect when they got married. My job was, in a way, completed. Not finished, but a phase that was completed. They were now going out on their own, and it was also a wrench, you know, it was also something that took a long time to get used to, longer than other people. But I often thought that if I, a person who hadn't gone through what I went through as a young girl, would not have been able to go through the second episode of my life, because you had to be terribly strong. I often was depressed. I was under sedation for quite some time. I got medication, I suffered with terrible headaches, with terrible depressions, I was on Valium for a long time, and I, I had always terrible headaches. I had such headaches, I had even the skin, I don't know, they did all kinds of things, because it wasn't normal to have such headaches, but it was the worry and everything else. But no kindness from their side. And you know what was even more upsetting than anything else? There was no need here, there was money and everything for everybody. I believe that when you are poor, you even part with something, when the other person should have something, but when you are well off ... when you are well off, what difference does it make? And why not look after the orphans of your brother, to see that they are well off, that they are not short. He promised me, my brother-in-law, he said, "Your children will have exactly what my children will have." And I was so soft, I believed. Why shouldn't I believe it? And if I didn't believe, I had no choice. There was actually nobody who could help me physically. My brother was just in the beginning of his life, you know, he was having small children, he was trying to make a life for himself in St. Etienne. He said, "I spoke to your brother-in-law, he seems a nice man, I'm sure he will help you." And he left, he said, "I'm sure he will help you." And he left me like that. And Armand was not

well, and he was studying, you know, so he was not much help either in those days. So really and truly, there wasn't a shoulder, on whom to cry, nor to do anything. And I missed it terribly. I missed it terribly. I suffered a great deal. I suffered, I suffered so much, I think nobody can even understand it, what I suffered. So I phoned my friends in France, and sometimes somebody came over and stayed for a while.

What about holidays? Were you with the family then?

Well, one year, one year a friend in France invited us to the seaside on holiday.

I mean, Jewish holidays, did your husband's family invite you, or the children?

Yes. Yes, we must have gone in the beginning. Yes, we went for Pesach, we went there, we went probably Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, we went there. It stopped when the children were 8, it stopped, yes. Because, I felt that my children were getting very frustrated in a certain way. They were going there, where there was wealth, where people were speaking big, they were coming home to a very modest surroundings. When they were there, come Chanuka, they would give them a sum of money, £5, £10, you know, it was big money in those days. They even phoned every week, Fridays, for Shabbat, they used to ring us up to wish us Shabbat Shalom, and then they used to ask many questions, you know, and I think it was very wrong to ask little children so many questions, children don't know any wrong and they go on and they tell everything they have on their tongue. It was none of their business either. But what I found was that there was a certain frustration, there was a very rich family, and they came home to a very modest. They're supposed to have exactly the same, but they weren't now, anyway. There was some kind of dissatisfaction, I

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could see, and I said it wasn't right. Here they go, they make them feel they are the Wineman children, you know? And then they come home, and they have a mother that counts every penny, you know? To make ends meet. And there is no fancy food, do you understand? How did they go together?

Did they show love towards your children when they were little?

Well, I'm sure they showed a certain love, I mean, pleased to see them, a certain love, I'm sure they enjoyed the children, lovely little girls.

So after that, how did you celebrate Jewish holidays?

Then I celebrated it at home, and we celebrated together with the Hecksher family, you know, they had no children, and they lived in the same building, and Mr. Heckshe died just before Sandra got married, and he was a very nice father figure for her, you understand? He was a very understanding gentleman, great gentleman, very fine person. He knew how to talk and to listen, and that was, and Mrs. Heckshe was very nice too, she always made them welcome, and she's still friendly with us today, I mean, she still loves the children, and the grandchildren now, too. She thinks they are her own! But yes, that were, as you would call it, adopted, or whatever, surrogated parents, or grandparents, or family.

But they became your family in London.

That's right, in a certain way. They were more friends. I was never on top of anybody really, I always remained independent, just the same. But for the children it was nice, and they were also helpful, you know, they, when I had problems that I could talk to them, you know.

(PHONE CALL HERE)

So they, I had an open house when my children were teenagers, when they were students. I had always a full house. There was always cakes, you know, always, they knew they could come, even the children sometimes laughs at me, because I said, "There was always mincemeat, you could go always a long way with that." The students can all eat, there's always enough to eat for everybody. And they brought home, you know, young people, they knew they could bring them home, they were welcome, and so they had very nice friends, girlfriends, and boyfriends, and they did travel, they did travel, and they travelled a lot. They would, one year the two girls, when they were students, one must have been 18 and one 20, they looked like little girls, they always looked younger, and they took a rucksack, and they went, they took an air ticket for £20, the two of them, I gave them £50, and they were going from Salzburg on to Yugoslavia, and from Yugoslavia into Greece, you know, a big journey they were doing, and all on £50, so I said, "One thing I would like you to do, is, first of all, not to take a lift in a car. Secondly, I would like you to, one day ring, and one day write, so that I know where you are." And I didn't know that was the time when the two sisters were at the age when I was wondering if they were going to get on very well, or quarrell all the time! But they were very good, they rang every second day, they wrote, they slept in students hostels. They managed to bring home presents. They managed to meet friends that came from Israel, they met them at a certain point in Greece, and they came home looking fantastic, and they had a marvellous time, and a present for everybody! I don't know how they did it, but they did it, and they enjoyed it.

Was it difficult for you to let them go like that?

Yes.

You must have been terrified?

I was so afraid, I said, "What kind of a mother am I?" They looked like two little girls. But in those days, they each had a boyfriend in London, so I said, "That's already a good sign", you know, like you say, I was afraid of the people, but it was a safer time than now, now you wouldn't let them go.

But still, you knew they were, they were all you had. They were everything you had.

Yes, yes, yes. That's right. And even today, and even today, although they like to be completely independent, they want to lead their own lives, they're still the only thing I, the only, and the little grandchildren now, they are so sweet, you know, but this is only that's my fortune, you know, not my fortune, that is what really has always had a meaning in my life, it's always had a meaning in my life. From the minute they were born. And I must say that they are good girls, they are nice people, they met nice partners. Sometimes, I spoke last night to my son-in-law, and he would like to listen to the tape, as I have never spoken to them about my experiences. I think it wouldn't be a bad idea if they would listen to the tapes, because I didn't have what they would call a normal life. I didn't have a normal life, you know, in any aspect, in any way. I didn't have a marriage which lasted, my husband died before our third anniversary, in between I was twice pregnant. You missed the love of a husband, the love of somebody that cares for you, there is no doubt.

You must have been tempted many times, to go back to France?

I did. But it took 20 years to settle my financial affairs. I couldn't go to France with no money either. How would I live in France without money. I couldn't be a burden on my

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family. I didn't want to be a burden on my family. I always wanted to keep my independence, I never wanted to borrow, nor ask anybody for anything.

Do you think if you had...

End of F147 Side A

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Also, before I knew about the settlement with Philips, I was in Israel, and I was seriously considering settling in Israel. By that time, my children were, in '65, Sandra was 11, you know, or more, '65, it must have been earlier, even, '63, '64. I went to Israel, I looked for a flat, I looked for something and I was emigrating to Israel. Because I thought, maybe I could make a life for myself in Israel. I have, I have family on my side, I have family on the other side, which were also on my side, which meant that I had somebody there. And Israel, I thought, was the place to go, for the children. They weren't so pleased, because they had already made friends in England, they had already roots, they'd taken root here. I had already an apartment, I was going round looking at apartments, and there were some at £8,000 Israeli, and it must have been £8,000 English, £12,000 English, prices like that, in 1964, '65. So the one that I really liked was £12,000, but it was too much money, so I thought £8,000, my niece who is a solicitor, came with me, and made sure that everything was all right, we were going to buy this and this apartment.

In Tel Aviv?

Yes, outside Tel Aviv, and I came back, my brother-in-law came to see me, brother-in-law, came to see me, and I said, "I saw an apartment, I want to go and live in Israel with the children." He says, "How much is the apartment?" "Well", I said, "I saw one at £8,000, and I saw one at £12,000", so he said, "Take the one at £12,000, why shouldn't you take the one at £12,000. Take the one at £12,000 if you like it better. And we give you £2,000 towards the costs of transferring, removal, you know, to get you to Israel." And I said, "And what is the condition?" "Take the case out of the court." So I said, "This I can't do." I said, "As much as I want to go to Israel," I said,

"I told you from the very beginning, I will not sign anything without the court's approval. I won't do it." And that was the time when I wanted to go to Israel. And after that, then it went on for another seven years, you see, or eight years, because I would not do anything without the court's approval. I would not accept any deals. If the court would have said "That's a good deal", I would have accepted it, but without the court's approval I wouldn't do it. And the court was never satisfied, they wanted to find, they wanted more paper, and more papers. My brother-in-law tried to convince me that my husband was not a 50/50 Partner in the company, and in the beginning, the very beginning, he's also, the solicitor, was supposed to be my husband's friend. He had written to the Inland Revenue that my husband was a 50/50 partner in the company, and only through searches, which cost a fortune in searches and searches, the paper came up. And after that, he gave that solicitor the sack, you know, but it took 20 years, to dig that paper out, you see. He had lied all along, he had told the truth in the beginning, and forgotten about it, and then he tried to diddle us, and it came out, so he had to find some kind of settlement there. And to this day, I have the impression, you know, because, the sister-in-law here in the suburb, who thinks she's so righteous, she thinks I diddled them, you understand? But unfortunately, unfortunately, I couldn't care less, it hasn't brought them any luck, money, none at all. I mean, she's all right with her children, but the rest of the family, it hasn't brought them any luck. One that got a lot of money, just gave away a big fortune in Israel. She gave to the hospital, in Israel, £780,000, just now, she died. She didn't leave anything to her poor relation in America, she gave very little to her grandchildren, and one grand-daughter nothing, and she left a quarter of a million to her son in ten years time, he's a very sick man, in ten years time, if he's here! Very strange. But no, it hasn't brought them any luck at all, that type of money doesn't bring any luck, either.

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I once asked you, but it wasn't on tape, why you never told your children about your experiences in the Holocaust.

Why I didn't? You must remember that none of us spoke of the Holocaust, my sister-in-law a little more than I did, because she's still living with it, all these years after, and she remembers a lot of details that I have forgotten. I felt that my children had suffered enough, by losing their father, and he would have been a wonderful father, he was a lovely man. He wanted to be a father, you know, he wanted a family, he was looking forward to it, his life had just started, but it was taken away. I felt sorry that he, I felt terrible that he died just when he was starting to live. He only worked, worked, worked and that was his beginning of living. He had now a wife, and he had children, and he was starting to live, and it was all taken away. And little Sandra, she was like the Queen, you know, she was like a little queen, because she was the first one, and she was from the youngest brother, and whatever she said was wonderful, when she walked it was wonderful, when she, everything was wonderful, she could never do anything wrong, and then he dies. And little Irene, nobody took any notice of her, because she was born at such a bad time, she used to be in the carrycot so quiet and so good, nobody took the slightest notice of her. And I felt terrible about it. She was the sweetest thing you could see, you know, she was so lovely, and when she had enough food she was quiet, she was so lovely. So therefore I found it, that was quite enough for little children, you know, to be deprived of a father, of the love of a father. To be deprived of the way of life that they could have had, that they were supposed to have. But I couldn't give it.

And you said you wanted them to feel normal.

Yes. Yes. Today, they turn round, and they say, "Mummy, we are very pleased the way you brought us up, because I

don't know how we would have turned out, if we would have been perhaps the Hampstead Garden Suburb type. We are much better off that way." That's what they say today.

But you were afraid that telling them about your experiences would

Traumatise them also. I felt that they must be traumatised already. Only much later did I let them see films, when they were showing sometimes documentaries, proper documentaries, and Sandra, to this day, can't look at anything sad, she won't go and see "Au revoir les enfants", she won't see anything sad. She probably was more traumatised even than her sister, because she knew her father, even only a little while. Maybe something remains, even at that early age, I don't know. Now she's a contented mother, she has four children of her own, so she has plenty to do and plenty to keep her happy. And she's a wonderful mother. Both are. Very good mothers. So, sometimes I feel maybe I did a good job, so ...!

Would you like Sandra to hear these tapes?

Yes, I hope she will one day, listen to it. Arnold is prepared to listen to it, so maybe she will listen with him. She finds it hard. She finds it hard. Irene probably will listen to it because she, we mustn't forget, she is a professional, so she ought to be, but she's also a softie, she will also feel it, but she will, but her husband who's a psychologist, he thinks from all the people he interviewed, he thinks that I am quite well-balanced for a person that has gone through what I have. But then they only know one part, they don't even know the second part.

They don't know all this about the family stuff?

No, no, not like that. The daughters, yes, they only know that they are supposed to be rich daughters and they are not! But they have good lives instead! And since, when Sandra got married, we finished with our, our case, and the first thing that I wanted to do, is to go and see my uncle, but he wasn't alive any more, I told you.

The one in California?

Yes. That was the first journey I did. And I met these wonderful people on the trip, which helped me there. And I bought this apartment, and I settled here again. But when I first moved in here, I was unhappy, you know why? For 20 odd years I had lived in the other apartment, it was a nice apartment, but it wasn't as luxurious, you know, as here, but it's where I brought up the children, that's where life went on. That's where everything happened. And here I have the feeling like I'm in a hotel room, you know, like I have everything new, all very nice, but nothing is happening here. So I used to go there, to the old flat, and sit there, with Irene, you know, and spend time there. I said, "Here, it's very nice", I said, "but it doesn't mean anything. I come over there." And the day we heard that the case was finished, my daughter was, Irene, Sandra must have been in Manchester, still a student in Manchester. Irene was in London at University College, and she had a boyfriend called Peter Fonagy, a Hungarian, who's a big shot today, also in psycho-analysis. So I said, "Do you know, I'm going to treat you tonight to something special. We must do something. We are going to Covent Garden, I'm going to see if I can get tickets." I got three odd tickets in Covent Garden, and I came home, and I said, "We have to be ready in an hour." It was all very fast we have to do that, poor Peter, he had only a dirty shirt, so we had to wash that shirt, iron it dry, and order a car to take us down, and to our surprise, a white Mercedes came, you know, a minicab, and we felt really good, you know, we went in

style, and we saw "La Noche de Figaro", sung beautifully. Kiri de Kawana was singing in it. So it was a big treat, and after that we went to Fortnum and Masons for a big ice-cream, and we felt we had celebrated 20 years of a battle. And people couldn't understand I wasn't rejoicing so much. It had taken too long, it just had taken too long, you know, I couldn't react like somebody who had just won the pools, you know, it had taken too long. It had taken too much out of me. So slowly I had to adapt myself, but I never really lived that much different, I thought, "You know, you can do this, you can do that." I improved certain things, but I never went right out, you know, went crazy. I still, by that time, Sandra was soon announcing that she got engaged, and so we had to arrange a wedding, you know, and so we got busy with nicer things. It took me, as I said, a long time, till I found that, that was my home now, my home, and the children were not any more at home, so my daughter Irene remained in the other apartment, the way it was, and lived there independently, she was now a big girl. She, she finished University, then she went on to, she studied another, she took another degree in education, then she taught for one year, then she worked in the Tavistock Clinic, then she, Anna Freud offered her another Scholarship, you know, so she worked there for five years, she learned and worked, and went through analysis, by the time she finished, she had ten years of studies, because Irene really wanted, at one stage, to be a doctor. So I said, "Irene, you know, I can't really afford to let you study for ten years." Today she says, sometimes, "Mummy, you said ten years was too long! But", she said, "I wasn't good in biology anyway!" But today, they are, both are professionals, Sandra is, she did Politics, Social Studies and Economics at Manchester, then she worked for Shelter, and when she got married, she worked for the Town Hall, in the Social Services. She had quite a responsible job. And when she came to London, she took a further degree in Housing, she had already a baby by then, four years later,

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three years later, and I looked after Rachel, after little Rachel, while she went for her course. But since she has four children, she hasn't worked, but she intends, I suppose, to do something, later on, again. But, as I said in the beginning, I wanted both girls to have a profession, something they can always do, or fall on. To be more interesting human beings too, and that's part of my life's work! Apart from the rest! I think we can practically finish the tape here. What do you think?

This is the fifth interview with Freda Wineman, the date is 10th January 1989.

I like just to say why we chose the names my daughters have. Sandra is the English name for my mother's name, who was Sarah, and who was called Rose, and we called Sandra, Sandra Ruth, we gave them the English name for the Hebrew names. My mother's name was Sarah, and when she came to France, she called herself Rose. And Irene actually, is, Michelle, she is Irene Michelle. Michelle is after my youngest brother, whose Hebrew name was Moses, and he was called Marcel. And we gave her the other name, Irene, but she preferred really Michelle, but we called her Irene. Irene married an American psychologist, and both live in Kew Garden, New York. Both practice in their profession. They have two lovely children, a little boy who will be three on 5th February, called Rafael, and a little daughter called Gabriela, who was born on 17th August, '88.

Would you like to go back now, and tell us something about your father's political activities in the thirties?

Yes. I was only a small child, because, in the thirties, in the early thirties, but I do remember my father walking, with the 'Front Populaire', and it made an impression, because hundreds and hundreds of people were walking, along the streets, and really, they were doing that, I only understood later, that the conditions for the workers were very bad in Alsace Lorraine. It was all around the Lorraine, there are mines, and there are also factories that, I think my father was very impressed then, and disgusted, I suppose, with the conditions at the time, and he was a fighter for the underdog; I think he always believed in justice, I suppose, and that was his little bit. As a Zionist, I would say he was a great Zionist, he really was like all people who came from Poland, and now live in the French country, although he loved France, he always

thought France was the country of milk and honey, and there was no other country like France. He was the greatest patriot they could find in France, he loved it. But he always dreamt that one day, we would all settle in Israel. In Israel. Palestine. Because he kept talking about it, and he kept showing us on the map, where it was, and he, I don't think he realised in those days, that he had relations already living in Israel, that came in 1918, 1919. I think, I don't know if he realised, or if he didn't tell me, because I was only small, but his dream was for a, the Jews should have a country of their own, or we should live there, at least, that was his dream. Even during the War, he kept showing us the map, how we could do it by car, through Turkey. A long way round, but there was a way that we could reach Palestine.

Do you think he dreamt of escaping to Palestine, during the War itself?

No, he, he always wanted to go, you know? Like many people, they always have their dream, they want to settle eventually in Palestine. And that we would one day have, a country of our own, Israel, I think that they couldn't imagine. But if I can just put it in here, when in 1948, the War of Liberation, I don't think I mentioned anywhere here in my tapes, that my brother Armand actually fought.

You did, he was in Beer-sheva, it's on the tape.

Yes, he fought in the Israeli Independence War. I was, at the time, in Paris, and there I met Marcelline Rosenberg, and we went and we wanted to go and fight in Israel, I remember, with many others. There was a whole group, there were even some American students there, who all presented themselves to go to Palestine to help in the War of Independence. And I remember, when it came to our turn, they said "We really need people that are qualified, you

know, pilots, we want. Engineers." And at the moment, they didn't need us, and we were very disappointed.

Did you actually go?

Oh yes, we went to wherever we had to go, the consulate or somewhere we went, I remember, both of us. A lot of people were there, queuing up, and I was one of them, with Marcelline, so we went and queued up for hours and hours, and eventually they told us, "No, not at the moment, they didn't want us." So what did we do. I must at least say this little story. We said, "Well, what shall we do this afternoon?" They wouldn't have us, and we were very disappointed. We are going along on the Marne, and we take a boat on the Marne, and have a little ride on the boat. A little boat. There were several Americans, I don't know what they were doing there, but there were several American boys, with cameras and everything, and they came with us, and we were having a happy time, when one of the American boys said, "Let me take a picture of you all here." And he made the little boat capsize, and we all ended up at the bottom of the Marne! The thing was, I was dressed in a suit, and every time I came up, I came up under the boat. Eventually, I was a good swimmer in those days, but the American boy with the camera was neither a swimmer, he had lost his camera, and we had to save him, and we had, all of us, had to go back, wringing wet, on the Metro! And the only place we could go was to Marcelline's home, and when her mother saw us coming in, she wasn't very happy, but she had a nice plate of chicken soup to get us round again, because we were frozen! And that was our effort of going to Israel to fight, but we weren't taken. Only people who had really, who could help, or fight. This young man, but already in those days, already they didn't take every young man, they only took some that had qualifications. I remember there was somebody, who was a pilot, he was taken.

Why did they take Armand?

Armand went earlier. Armand went much earlier, he was in the tanks, no, he was in the Palmach, and the Madame Frey's son was in the tanks. They both of them went very early, they went from St. Etienne, they went earlier. Then later, you know, they were asking still for more people to go, then we also wanted to go, but ...

How did you feel when Israel was actually established?

I happened to be in Paris, the declaration of Independence. I think there was, there has never been a happier moment, never. We were happy, we were dancing, we were having such a wonderful time. It was a dream we never thought would ever come, and we felt maybe it will be the answer, you know, to all what we went through, you know, that we will have a country of our own. At least we will have somewhere to go. And we were dancing all night, I think there was such joy, you know, such relief, such joy, it was only afterwards, you heard, you know, the casualties and everything, but at that moment, I can only remember, we were in front of a building, possibly something to do with Israel, and we were all chanting and dancing all night, all night, all night, yes. It was, there was something very special for once, for once we felt like we were being saved, you know, we were being given, that was more than we ever dreamt of really. As much as we thought it might come about, we never really thought that will happen in our time, and what happened in a very moment like that, is I wished my parents, you know, were here to live that moment, because they learnt all their lives about it, and now it was a reality and they weren't here to experience it, that's what the sadness was. Until we heard that my brother was all right, that took some time, because he was in a hospital. In fact, I only, I don't know if I told...

End of F147 Side B

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I was in Eilat swimming in the Red Sea when the guard called me back, and he said, "Come back, come back", he said, and when I came out of the water, he said, "It's full of sharks, you shouldn't go that far." I said, "But I've seen you that far." He said, "Never mind me, they know me, but you shouldn't go that far", he said. And what was very strange, I flew back with Arkia, that was the Israeli Airline at that time, because the planes, I think they had only 3, and who sat next to me? It was that beach guard. So I was telling him that I came from England, and that my relations were called Arieli, and he said, "I know Arieli", he said. I said, "My brother was fighting in the Palmach, and he was, his name is Armand Silberberg, and he was gravely wounded in Beer-sheva." He said, "I was with him, I know him", and he said, "and you know, he was very lucky to be alive, because we found him, I think he was one of the very few survivors. There was a whole truck which jumped on a mine, and there were very few survivors." Apparently he was, he had a concussion, he was, for many days, not conscious, even, and I think that didn't help afterwards, with his condition, you know, when he came back, he was not the same man any more. He was only 18, or 19,* when he went, you know, very young. So he...that's from him I heard the story of my brother. When I came home, I told my aunt, who was my mother's sister...my father's sister, I said, "Do you know, I met this man, this is his name", I can't remember any more. "Oh," she said, "I know him," he did not only know my brother, but apparently her own son did once walk in the desert with another boy, in a, in a space, which is supposed to be very dangerous, and they got lost, and when they were 15, you know, they were a bit wild, they went out in the desert, and this same guard found them. There were two stories attached to that one, it was very strange, and so that was the story of that beach guard, he looked a bit like, Robinson Crusoe you know, with his hair and everything

a little bit white, but he was very nice. My brother Armand, had a good chance of remaining in Israel, the family really loved him and wanted him to stay on the Kibbutz. [Interviewee has since said he was in fact 22.] I don't know if I mentioned this before.

You did mention that you and David urged him to stay there.

No, that was in Casablanca.

No, in Israel, yes.

But he said he couldn't live there, he had to come back to France, he had to be, he was, he needed France, he needed Paris, he needed a life in France. Israel was a difficult and hard country in those days, and I think he wanted to have it easier, so he left. Maybe also a mistake on his part. His destiny, and always, he always went against it. He had so many chances in his life, and he threw one away after the other. When we look back, we think he really threw everything away, you know, he had wonderful chances to be well, to live nicely, and to make a better life for himself, but he didn't.

Perhaps now you can tell us what you know about what he actually went through, from the time, he spent the whole War in Auschwitz itself?

Yes.

So do you know anything about his experiences there?

Armand I never saw in Auschwitz, you know, I only saw David once, passing him quickly. Armand I never saw, and when he came back, and he was the first one I saw, who came to see me in the hospital, and he looked so terribly ill, not that he was thin, he was fat, but he was grey, he looked

terrible, and he never really spoke a lot about the work he did. I think he was quite a lot of time ill, in the hospital. He only spoke, before the Russians came, what the Germans did, you know, that they assembled them, that they were to be all shot.

We have that on the tape.

He also told us that Janine's sister, he visited her in hospital, she was very sick, and he felt very bad about it because he couldn't save her. But he couldn't save her, she was too ill. He said he went to see her, and she didn't make it. And he only told us that when the Germans ran away from Auschwitz themselves, and the Russians came then, they started to go into the, you know, where the Germans kept the food, and there they found that the Red Cross parcels, which they never gave to the inmates, you know, which they kept for themselves, and they opened them up, and they ate all this condensed milk, which was far too rich, and all these tins that were far too rich for them, and, of course, they were all ill. And from there he was taken to Odessa, where he spent several days, and then he was, went on a boat that took him back from Odessa, to Marseilles, as it was. And from Marseilles, he made his way to St. Etienne, cos that was the place we said we would meet if we come back. And I think the rest I told you.

And you don't know what he did in Auschwitz?

He never talked about it, no. None of us talk about what we went through, all those years. Never. David never. Never.

What do you know about David's experiences?

Nothing. Except that he was at the Reunion in Israel, and he met that man that he recognised, or he thought he was in

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the same march, and then, in Gross-Rosen, and they started to talk, did I hear for the first time, how much my brother went through. I only know that the terrible thing they did, and this they, he told me, he was arrested after the operation.

The eye operation?

Yes, the eye operation, and therefore he was, his eyes were bandaged, and the first thing they did, when he arrived in Auschwitz, they took it off, and they blinded him, light. And one, and because he, he was ill, you know, he was deported just after the operation, that's the only thing he told us. He, he was not at the appel in the morning, and they kept counting and counting and counting, and there was one missing. Well, when they went back into the block, they found him asleep, because he was sick, so they beat him up so much that he was nearly crippled. And he couldn't see, he was ill. After that, he didn't talk what anybody did to him, he never spoke about it, only that bit that he was, they took his bandages away, and he couldn't see, and he fell asleep and they beat him up. And he once also said that he could have had it easier, he only mentioned it like that. He was what they call a very nice looking young man, and I think he was approached by Kapos. But he didn't agree to it.

There were obviously others who did agree to such things?

Yes. But he didn't.

But he, he didn't spend the entire time in Auschwitz?

No, he was, he went to Gross Rosen, in Gross Rosen, there was a march, and they went to Gross Rosen and they were, I don't know his story from there, I don't know.

Where was he Liberated?

He was Liberated in Mauthausen, in Mauthausen, yes, Mauthausen. That I know, that is the bit I know, that he was Liberated in Mauthausen, by the Americans, and the first thing he did, he found a German, who was wearing a very nice suit, they went into a house, I think, he found somebody who was wearing a very nice suit, about his size, he was still in the camp garb, and he asked him to take it off, and he put it on.

And the German agreed?

Yes. Yes. He asked him to take it off, and to give him his clothes, so that he could take his clothes off. And then he was very very sick, so he had to be taken to hospital, and that he was flown back, and was in the hospital, and the Americans took care of him. But otherwise, what happened in between, I never heard, except that he started to talk in, in

Jerusalem?

In Jerusalem, and I wanted to listen to his story, because I had never heard it, but Marcelline Rosenberg wanted to, had never been in Israel, wanted to see B'nai Brak so we had to go to B'nai Brak, so I went to B'nai Brak with her. But I was just listening to what he was saying, how terrible it was. He fell asleep again, and he tried to hide under a hay, and they found him. It was, it was too terrible for words. When I remember these convoys of men in open trucks covered in snow. That was his experience, I don't know which convoy it was, they all must have been like this one.

But, before you go onto the convoys, do you think that Janine knows his story?

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She might, she might. He's going now, to a dinner in Paris, on 22nd, which I, of January, which is for the people who were on that march. Then they speak, so I said to Janine, "What about us going there?" She said "We really were not on that march, it really is more for the people that were on that march." But maybe he, I don't think he doesn't speak, he doesn't speak about it. He refuses to speak, only with the people who actually were on that march. He finds it still too painful. He cannot speak about my parents. He cannot speak about my brother. When it came to sell the books about the children of Izieux (near Lyon), he got very, you know, he got a bit worked up, he rang the whole of France, they must buy the book, of the children of Izieux, but I think at the back of his mind, it was his young brother, you understand? He sold, I don't know how many books, he forced them really, everybody had to buy, and it was also, I think it had to do with my young brother, you understand, they were all young children like him. He doesn't talk, he doesn't talk.

Did he or Armand name any of their own children after your parents, or Marcel, the way you did?

Yes, yes. They all have the names. They're Jewish names, yes, they have the Jewish names. They used the French names for France, you know, but they have Jewish names. And Patrick is really Abraham, after Janine's father, and Huguette, Huguette, was the sister, and she only had one daughter, her mother was Suzanne, and they all have names, the names they have second. In France it's not as familiar as here to give people Biblical names, it's now a little bit the fashion to call girls Sarah, but it wasn't before. Whilst here they give them Biblical names quite normally, and not

Do you know whether his children had tried to get him to talk to ...

Janine has spoken to them, much earlier than I have, because I haven't spoken to my children. But she has. I don't know what she talked about, what she tried to tell them. She probably told them about conditions, but I think young children, it's difficult to imagine these things. I don't know how much she said. She only reminded me that I should also talk and I said, "I cannot, and I'm not going to." I said, "Later on, later. Much later." And then I personally, I didn't speak to them, I let them watch television when there were some programmes, watch documentaries, and then they didn't like it. And the only thing, as I told you, I told them about my Hungarians, how wonderful they were, and I wondered if they were alive. That is the only thing they knew, because I was always thinking about these girls, and some of these you know, funny things that happen, you know, funny stories, you know, things that would make you laugh, but no, no, no, none of the sad stories, or the horrible stories, no.

One of the stories you did tell them was the one about your marriage proposal?

Oh that was, when you're 20, and you have your first marriage proposal in a Camp, that's in a way, tragic! But I must say, we were working there, in the Commando Kanada, we must have been making parcels outside, because we were all in a circle, and

Parcels of what?

Parcels of the clothing, you know. People there had, yes. We probably were sorting out the parcels, and putting the string around, and the men must have come around us, because we never were allowed to look right or left, and they must have picked them up, do you understand? Because they were running, they never could walk, they had to run, so they, as we finished the parcels, they must have picked them up and

run. So suddenly, I saw a curtain ring in front of me, and the next time somebody ran round again, he said, in Yiddish he said it, my Yiddish wasn't so hot, but I did understand that, he said, "I want to get married to you when I come out, after the War." But at that very moment, I looked at that ring, and I tried to turn round, and of course, I didn't, I didn't see any more who it was, do you understand? I could only see they were young men and were coming round and round, and I felt, in a way, I don't know how I felt at that very moment, because we weren't a pretty sight, you know, without hair or anything like that, and it was early days, I probably still had my rosy cheeks, you know, all that I could see was this ring, and somebody who said, "I want to get married to you", and in circumstances like that, I couldn't believe it, you know, I thought it was a dream, or what was happening to me, I couldn't believe it. And I never saw his face properly, I didn't know which one it was, because they kept running! It's unbelievable, isn't it. I don't think he saw me very much either, because we were turned in a circle fashion, we were all looking towards the clothes, and we weren't allowed even to look at a man, or turn round, because we were surrounded by the Germans with the dogs, you know.

You said you saw David once very briefly?

Yes. That was very near the beginning, that must have been August, because when I was Kanada, we were sorting out the clothes, and I told you before, it was, it was heartbreaking, the job we were doing. We used to pass, we used to pass mountains of glasses, of reading glasses, mountains of shoes, mountains of clothing, and cases, and everything. But we were just forced to do that job and, and sort out, you know, pullovers, pullovers, jumpers, shirts, and I don't know. And one day, on the way out, marching, as I said we must have been about 50, they only took a very small amount, a few people, very few people to

this Commando, so we must have been marching out of the gates, with that music, I told you, and Birkenau didn't have a tree, nor grass, nor anything, but we must have walked a little bit further, there was a few trees, I remember that, and that Commando of men, you know, young boys, came towards us, young ones, and suddenly there was my brother. I even rushed over and kissed him. And that was the only time I saw him, but he knew I was alive, and I knew he was alive, that's all. And once, he got a little note over, through somebody, I don't know how, but he did, which said, "Should we survive, any of us, don't forget, we meet in St. Etienne." And that was the, the only time we were in touch. That was in the early days. After that, we didn't know what happened to any of us. In that, in that convoy, it must have been that convoy, because it was winter, October, but it could also be February, it was probably still cold in February, I don't think it was on the first convoy. From Auschwitz, from Birkenau, to Bergen Belsen, we arrived really in a wretched condition to there. We travelled from 30th October, to 3rd November, and how did we reckon, because, I told you, we, we knew, you learn, when you haven't got, when you haven't got a time, you look after, you learn how the sun rises, and what hour the sun is on this and this spot, and eventually, you know, we reckoned what time it is, more or less. I wanted to say something else.

About the convoy?

And I also want to say, how did we get news, that we knew that on 6th June the Invasion? I think that as the convoys were arriving in Auschwitz, still all the time, you know, we arrived on the third of June, but every day there were convoys arriving. These people, the Sonder Commando that were working near the trains, the one who told my mother to take the baby, and told the young woman to give up the baby. These people asked, as they were running, they asked,

"What's happening in the outside?" And probably somebody told them France, the Invasion took place in France on 6th June. And in no time the rumour spread through to everybody in the Camps, you know, because people were going from one Camp to another. You only saw men walking through, you didn't see them working in our place, we saw them beaten up in our place, punished in our place, but we didn't see them working, or only a few sometimes, in trenches, but they were not, Jews, you remember, I told you, there were Russians, Germans, criminals, or whatever, no Jews, and so we heard, but you see, what broke our hearts was that we heard this kind of news in here every day, and transport was arriving from everywhere, in masses. It was getting worse, it wasn't getting better, but getting worse. And then sometimes we heard planes going over us, and nothing happening, you know. We were very, very very depressed in those days. And that's when I saw my parents' friends arrive, Rosenbergs, from Lyon. And my parents had very good friends in Lyon, called Rosenberg, they knew them already from Metz, they were very intimate friends, and there was a convoy which arrived in August, in Birkenau, and eventually we saw the girls that arrived, and one of them was Ida Rosenberg. I said, "But how come you are here? How come they took your parents?" They said, "Yes, we have travelled about four weeks in a train." For four weeks they had been travelling, right through Germany, all the time, stopping and going, stopping and going, four weeks, and eventually they brought them to Birkenau. Her parents didn't come back. Ida came back. Her sister survived, with two children, she had two children. Her husband was deported, he didn't come back. But that's how we heard news, you know, through the convoys that came, so they gave a little, a word here and there, so they guessed, and maybe there were, there were some of the people that were old timers, that were like Malla, who spoke 16 languages, who was in the Office, and a few of them that were, they needed, the type of the people they needed, a few, I mean, you could

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count them, but they must have heard, you know, things that they heard and passed on sometimes. You never saw, otherwise, how would you hear, how would you hear, you see? It's only through word of mouth that it came around. That's how we knew, you know. When a convoy arrived, I'd ask, "Where are you coming from?" And he said, "Litzmanstadt", (Lodz ghetto) do you understand? And I asked them, the other, "Where are you from?" And he said, "Hungary", and we were just happy to be working there, otherwise we wouldn't have known, you see. That's how we got to know the, the nationalities. North Africa came late, Greece came late, you know, all these people in the end, you know, came. They even took the whole of Jewry, you know, everybody, the final solution was, the final solution was, they wanted to get rid of all Jews, you know, there was no more where they could get hold of.

Would you have liked the Allies to have bombed the Camps while you were in them?

Yes, yes, yes. We would have welcomed it, we would have welcomed it. We were prepared to die, I mean, it's difficult to believe when I'm sitting here in the chair, that we were, that we would have welcomed to die, if they would have bombed the crematorium, and bombed us and finished us off completely. We were prepared to die in there. Yes. You, you didn't really want to live, you know, you didn't have the urge to live, but you fought on when you knew nothing else was happening, but you were not prepared for long. And you were very, if this was going to save more Jews being burnt, you know, we were prepared to die for that, of course.

Do you think everyone felt the same way?

Yes, yes, yes, yes. We were always sorry that the...because every time a convoy arrived, it broke our

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hearts, you see, we were, all right, they're the last ones, but then we saw so many other trains arriving, and it was towards the end of the War, you see, the War was lasting too long, for us. The War was lasting too long. That was '44, you know, it didn't finish till '45, by that time they had time to kill another million or more.

You must have seen people commit suicide?

Yes.

On the fences?

Yes.

Anyone that you knew well?

No, no, not that I knew, I only saw, here and there.

You actually saw it happen.

Oh yes, yes. They threw, I mean, you saw people

Still hanging on the fence?

Yes, on the fence. They were the ones that were, that arrived, we were never so near the fence, you know, we were always guarded, but the ones that had a chance to go through.

It must have been very tempting under the circumstances?

Yes, but you didn't have a chance to go, you know, to walk ...

End of F148 Side A

F148 Side B

They committed suicide, by throwing themselves against the electric fence. I think I saw one or two who actually were stuck up to the fence. But they were men, and maybe they were from the Sonder Commando, because we were in Birkenau, and we were only women where I was, and, and the distance to the fence was a certain way away and you could never really walk around the actual camp at night. If you went you could go across the road, where there was the hospital, the Revier, because you needed treatment, but nobody actually walked round the Camp, they weren't free to walk, we were not free at all to walk round. So I suppose that must have been men who had to go from one place to another, but having the guards around the Camp, and the lights, you really could not so easily get to the fence, even if you wanted to. I didn't see any of the women actually that really took their lives. And I also, although sometimes I think, "Oh how was it that we men and women." Number one, there were no men around there. Number two, I never saw any woman having any contact with a man or being able to go away to another block, and have anything to do with another man, this I never saw.

What about sexual abuse by Kapos, or SS or whatever?

I didn't see that either. I only saw brutality, you know, being beaten up, but I must add to that, that apparently there was a brothel, in Birkenau, or Auschwitz. And some of the girls that disappeared, were actually in a brothel.

They disappeared from where?

From, let's say, from appel. Let's say they were called to go somewhere to work, or just were taken to a brothel instead. And we did hear that they were abused, and eventually they never came back to the block that they

originally came from, but they went right to the crematorium, understand? There was a brothel, that we heard. Because when they went for the selection, where they said, "Are you French for so many hundred years?" We didn't know if, what it was for. We heard afterwards that they were taken for experiments, and some we saw coming back. And we also heard there was a selection which went to the brothel. But they never came back. But we heard that once they had abused them, you know, they were not, they disappeared. Life was cheap. And that was a matter, that to survive, not from day to day, you survived from hour to hour, you never knew the next hour, what was going to happen to you.

So in the selections that you have described earlier, where you wanted to look good, but not too good?

Yes. Yes. You didn't know, you never knew what it was for. If you looked good, you didn't know who they took really, you didn't know how they choose people, how they choose them. And here, there were selections by men, and there were selections by the SS women, and they were horrible. They were horrible, I don't know where they got them out from. They were so cruel these women. They were no better, the men, the men or the women, it was the same. They were the same. So I personally, I didn't see anything happening between men and women, personally, at all. Perhaps, perhaps the Kapos were different, living in small little huts. I think, I think life was far too hard and, and not only hard, it was, the circumstances were so terrible, and I think we were very young. We were young in age, but we were very naive. We only realised afterwards how naive we were, because we could not understand the language that some women spoke, when they said they had hidden, let's say, things in their vagina, but then the Germans knew that. Therefore, they were searched. They

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hid diamonds and gold, and God knows what. There was a traffic going on, do you understand?

Between prisoners and guards?

Prisoners, and prisoners that had the higher echelon, or anything like that, but I tell you, it never occurred to us. We only heard afterwards about these things. And then there were some women, you know, that preferred not to eat bread, but to have a cigarette. They made a deal with others, for cigarettes. But somehow, they were aware of the older ones, that knew where to get cigarettes. One piece of bread that would get two cigarettes, so they didn't eat, but they had two cigarettes.

How did they light their cigarettes?

I don't know, I can't remember, they must have made a deal with the matches, or something. There was a little bit of that going on. Like, I made a deal with the toothbrush, they made a deal with the cigarettes. And then, you know, they pinched your bread, and then you had no bread, and they had a cigarette, and they had bread, you know, it all happened. You had to watch your own people too, in circumstances like this, anything can happen. The age group was 16, 17, 18, 19, a few women that were 30. Then we saw once, about 12 elderly women, I said, "But these women are older than my mother, how come they are alive?" Here and there, as I mentioned before, they kept a few old ladies, and a few young children, in case there was a Red Cross

Visit?

Visit, or visit or something, they could say, you see, "We have old people, we have young children", but there were, I

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couldn't believe it, that they were there. They kept them for a while, you know.

But they were also shaven and tattooed?

Yes, yes, and very old. Old in comparison to an age group that was, we were in. And these children were about 8, 10, 12, they looked like old men, but they were young children. And only a few. We couldn't understand that, but they must have kept them for certain purposes.

What's the story of Mallah?

Yes, Mallah. I think I mentioned Mallah, who told us in the very beginning that,

She's the one that told you what was going on in the gas chambers?

Yes, yes, yes. She is the one who right away, well, not right away. When they'd taken everything away from us, who told us that we must be prepared for the worst. And then we didn't see Mallah again, personally. She was young, she was nice looking, I think she had hair, she had hair, and she was dressed, can't remember how she was dressed, if she was dressed in civilian clothes, or if she was, she might have even been dressed in ordinary clothes, not in the striped clothing, because she was a translator, you know, and she was in the offices.

Where was she from?

Belgium. The only thing we knew is that she tried to escape, you know, she tried to escape in a German uniform, with another man, in German uniform, she got it, I don't know how, and they were going out of the Camp, and they were going to take a message out of the Camp, to tell the world,

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and apparently it was planned, fantastically planned, with probably the co-operation of somebody in the Camp, maybe, to get out, well, that far. The clothes and everything. And they were caught, nearly out of the Camp, and then the sirens went, the whole Camp, everybody had to stand appel, and we heard that there was an escape, they dragged her back, there were, we heard they were going to hang her, but she cut her wrists, and therefore, unfortunately, that's what we heard, they took her right to the crematorium, and they said at the time, that they don't think she was dead when they took her and threw her into the oven. Of course, there was a curfew afterwards, I don't know how long. Nobody was allowed out, escape, no. But there were two. Then there were the Sonder Commando episode, the same story. And this was, this was the time, it was the time when I told you the sky was black, you couldn't, you didn't know if it was day or night, because they were, the ovens are going day and night. And we were working there, again, trenches, or whatever, and I said, "I think the world is coming to an end, this time, there is no more daylight." You know, it was dark all day, black. And suddenly, the sirens started to go again, the whole Camp, and just there where the fence was, there was a whole lot of men, one strung on to the next, you know, by string, they put cords on their legs, they must have shot them already, and they were being dragged, dragged, and they were lying on the ground, some were dragging them, I don't know.

Tied together at the ankles?

Yes, yes, they were being dragged. And we were told that these were the men from the Sonder Commando, who had tried to escape, they brought them all back. And that was the end. And this was the, that was the two times we saw some resistance. Other resistance, you had no chance, we had no chance, we were surrounded by machine guns, we were surrounded by dogs, and they quickly got rid of you, you

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know, so only people were, like Mallah, but she tried to organise it very well, they went out as Germans, you know, but these fellows must, we only, it was so dark, we could only see they were being dragged, I don't know what they were wearing, if they'd found clothes, or if they were wearing their other clothes. But, of course, the minute they saw we were still outside, there was the sirens, everybody had to run back to the block. But any time anything like this happened, our morale sank deeper and deeper into despair, because we could see that nobody could escape all this. These were the days when you couldn't, I think in the very very early days, '42, '43, there were some escapes still, you know, it wasn't as bad as, as organised as they were in '44, and then the security there around the block was really, so that, how anybody could get out, had any chance. Because there were men going to factories, I think there was a salt mine, somewhere, because some people went out, I heard, to work in a salt mine. They didn't survive very long either, you know, going to work in a salt mine. But you couldn't, to escape was nearly an impossibility.

It never occurred to you to try?

Yes. There was no chance. There was no chance whatsoever for you, there was not even a chance to go anywhere, very far, without being shot. You had no chance. And you know, once they, if you were going to do anything that was against, being in the block, you know, what you were in for, you were selected for the gas chamber, the next thing. There was no such thing otherwise, you know, you weren't brought back to your block, no. There was no such thing.

So the risk was too high.

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There was no chance, it was one fence after the other, and all the fences were electrified, so what chance have you got? None. And high fences. And guards all over.

And you weak, you were too weak anyway to attempt such a ...

And I tried to escape when I was weaker still, but that was outside,

Yes, during the

Yes, on the way to Theresienstadt. Now, imagine if you were to try to escape even in Ragun where I told you the Germans spit on us, what chance did you have that a German would take you in? They weren't going to help you. They weren't going to help you. And you looked so pathetic, you know, nobody wanted you, you were sick with typhus or whatever, they wouldn't want you, with lice or whatever. We were not humans any more, we were some creatures, we looked anything but human. But, these are the two. I also would like to mention it. These convoys, when we must have been travelling between Bergen Belsen and Ragun in February, it was snowing very hard, and we were in cattle trucks, closed ones, we were in closed cattle trucks.

In the trains.

Terrible conditions inside. But the men, when we passed one station, there was a train with men in open trucks, in the snow, already looking more dead than alive. And I remember seeing one father with his son, it was such a pathetic sight.

What were they doing?

They were walking, they must have allowed them to walk, or something, because they were, it was snowing on them, it was

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Yes. We were, a lot of us had extra clothes. And he says, "You, and you and you", it could have been me. And the second time, when he said, "Stop or I'll shoot you".

When you tried to escape?

Yes.

But the second incident, to stop the escape attempts, that's what comes back to you all the time in your nightmares.

Yes, yes.

What about the first, does that? That hasn't come back to you?.

I suppose this is because, the running, is because it was the tail end. It was towards the end, when we couldn't cope any more. When we knew that is the end. Whilst in the beginning we went through so many other horrible things. We had gone already through a few years, but we saw a lot more. But then, by then, it was the end. This was why Janine keeps saying, "Why did you leave me at the end?" There was still a glimmer of survival in me, probably.

Yes, clearly there was.

Yes. Just, there was hardly anything left, but I still tried. Some tried and didn't succeed. I'm sure many tried and didn't succeed. Because really and truly, most people want to live, except the Hungarians, I don't know, they gave up immediately, they couldn't take it. The Hungarians, I couldn't believe my, I never could believe it. When I went into this barracks, houses, Bergen Belsen, when I went into the barracks, and I spoke to these people, one day, and the next day I went back and I said where are they?

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All dead, dead, on a pile, outside, dead. And eventually, it was...they didn't say much yesterday.

But gassed?

No.

But dead of what?

Just died. Bergen Belsen had no crematorium, they just died.

The Hungarians were at Bergen Belsen?

Yes. Some in Budapest. Not the first lot. This is the one that came from Budapest, the ones that were in the deal with the Germans, and at the end they still sent them to Bergen Belsen. That was the last train from Budapest. Budapest, not just Hungary, Budapest. There was a deal with Budapest, and when they arrived, they looked quite human, I mean, and they just died, they just died.

Within days?

Yes. They couldn't take the conditions. There were no conditions, they were on the floor, no straw, no food, no water, no this, no that, they just died. That's why you had corpses, and corpses and corpses. When the British liberated Bergen Belsen, there were mountains of corpses.

But in the photographs you always see skeletons? The Hungarians couldn't have been skeletons if they'd only just arrived,

In the beginning they died before they were skeletons even. But we will come very quickly a skeleton, you know, when you get nothing to eat. And this was April, and I was there in

February, February, March, April, by that time they were skeletons, you see, but in the beginning, they didn't look skeletons. I could understand why they were dying so fast.

And you think it's because they just

They let go.

Let go.

They didn't want to live, they didn't want to live. And there was no crematorium there, there were just the conditions, you know, the conditions. And there, the guards must have come out from a madhouse. I've never seen such mad eyes in my life, and they looked at us as if they're mad, you know, terrible eyes they had, and they just beat people up. Mad. Completely mad, crazy people, the guards. They never gave you a chance, they came in the morning, they came into the barracks at three, four o'clock, just beat everybody up, you know. The bones were just cracking, you know, and you know why.

Did they, you too, were you beaten up? Did they use weapons?

Truncheons. You were lucky when you escaped. The conditions were terrible there. Terrible conditions, by that time I was, one, one must have been a doctor, she said, "You have avitaminose", avitaminose, the thing, I said, "Why have I got so many boils?" You know, full of boils, full of boils.

Avi?

Avitaminose. Short of vitamins. Yes. You get boils, terrible boils.

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Everybody must have had them, or were yours worse?

Yes, I had a lot more, I had a lot. Janine didn't have quite as many, but I had a lot. But by that time we were in a bad condition already, that was even before we arrived in Ragun, that was before we started work in a factory.

They must have been very desperate for slave labour, to take people who had been through two death camps, as workers?

Yes, yes, yes. We worked at night.

Only at night?

Yes.

Why was that?

They didn't want, during the day, they had the Germans.

Oh I see.

But at night. And only the Germans were the ones, you know, the Foremen, or whatever, were German, I told you how they didn't help us, I told you.

Mmmm.

And we worked on big machinery, big machinery. We worked with, like asphalt, but we had to do it properly, you know, there was the, get it right, do it properly.

They didn't feed you any better at Ragun, so that you'd be able to do this work?

No, no, not at all. No. Full of lice, still scratching. When I think of it, terrible.

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Whenever you say lice, you scratch yourself!

Yes, yes, lice, terrible. And they also, the German SS, that terrible woman there, you know, I used to look at her and say, "How can you be like this? You are young yourself, why do, how can you treat us like this? How can you be so cruel to us?" Terrible conditions, bad. Yes, that's where my finger is half missing.

End of F148 Side B

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We were with Anne Frank. Janine remembers, very well, she says that she was a very young girl, and she always spoke about her father, and she was Dutch. I only remember that we were with the Dutch, I remember vaguely that there was a young girl, but we were all so young, we were all so so I didn't take so much notice, because everybody took notice of something else, you know. I took notice of, of I think it was Simone Weil who was with us at the time, and she took notice of Anne Frank, you know, because we were together. And Marcelline was with us, so they were the ones we really took notice of. But from the documentaries, and the things I have read about Anne Frank, it is possible, I'm nearly sure that she must have been at the same time in, in the same time at Birkenau, and must have followed either in our transport, or the next one, to Bergen Belsen, because every so often there was a transport to Bergen Belsen. We arrived in 30th October, in Bergen Belsen, she could have arrived on that same train, she could have arrived the next train, or the one before, but this was about the time when she also arrived in Bergen Belsen. And as I said, these are more or less the three nationalities that were together, French, Belgian and Dutch. They were more or less always kept together, so it is quite possible that she was with us. As she kept a diary she's one of the well-known persons, young persons, that we speak about, but she was only one of millions of others that were there, and had the same fate. And she was also very young, she was 14, 15, wasn't she, so she was one of the very young ones. Mostly they were a little older. They didn't let many people in at 14, so she must have been quite tall, and looked more than her age, because most of the girls were 17, the youngest, 18, 19, 20. And as I said, a few of 30, and rarely a few of 40, that must have looked very good, and these few old women that they let through, no, nobody old. Everybody looked like old people after a while, you know, but she must have been

one of the very young ones. But she says she remembers her quite well. She died, like everybody else in Bergen Belsen, like flies, you know, they all just died. They made you stand appel for hours on end. Food we didn't get either. Maybe a piece of bread. I can't even remember they gave us anything to eat, funnily enough. Drinks I cannot remember either. We must have had a tap, I only remember washing in the ice cold water, there was one cold tap, one cold tap somewhere in the Camp, where people washed. Can you imagine it? One cold tap that you washed in. Probably you could take water, if you wanted water, to drink, if you were allowed out. You know, you were not allowed out. And when we left, we left in February, the piles of, of cadavers started to be there. You started to have piles of corpses that were already starting, because from what I saw afterwards, there were mountains of corpses there, but this was the beginning, in February. February, March, April, in two-three months, with typhus and one thing and another, they're corpses, and no, no medication, nothing. I can't even remember that they had, oh yes, there was a hospital. A hospital! There was something, because they once brought all the people out, it's the sick, and everybody had to stand appel on the New Years Day, so some there was somewhere some kind of hospital.

What did you do there when you weren't standing appel?

Nothing. We didn't work.

You just stayed inside the barrack.

You were either inside, or standing appel.

You weren't allowed to be outside unless it was on appel?

Yes. We only, people just died. You didn't work there. All these corpses that you saw, people just sat and starved

to death, that was the end. Because I cannot even remember that they gave us food, regularly, I can't remember anyway. In Auschwitz I knew that they were throwing a piece of bread to us in the evening, and there I can't even remember that.

Well, you must have had something, but it must have been very sporadic?

That's how they gave to you, eventually got all their corpses, you know, because they didn't work. In Ragun probably also there was bread, I can't remember about the food. Less and less food. Less and less. What we had it was very unpleasant, because you never had enough food, your stomach juices used to regurgitate, brought up all the time juices, there was nothing in your stomach at all, it was very unpleasant. There was this, terrible, water coming out of your mouth, you know. So today, if I have a stomach ache it is understandable, so I have to be very careful. I never recovered completely. We all have problems with our stomachs. Very sensitive stomachs, very sensitive bowels, never recovered entirely. But if, you know, if we are careful, light food, or be very careful, very but we have to watch out.

Would you like to say something about Drancy, the conditions there?

The conditions in Drancy. As far as I remember in Drancy, Drancy, I think they were houses, they were houses, it was like a, like a, like a district, you know, of a town, I don't know, a kind of district, there were some houses, there was even somewhere where people went to have a shower, there was some kind of organisation there, there must have been, we didn't see so much the Germans there, we saw a kind of a Jewish Organisation, you know, people in the Drancy organised themselves. Its only when the transports went, the Germans were there. We were, we were really bewildered

when we arrived there, you know, "What's happening?" And I think they separated, I don't know if we were separated even there. I only remember seeing Robert Weil arrive with his wife and his children, that was terrible, to see them arrive. And his wife Olga, was already in a terrible state, you couldn't talk to her, because they had been caught at the Swiss Frontier, going over to Switzerland. I remember seeing them at the shower, you know, it was a communal shower, I don't know how many people could go in there. I remember her with her two little children, in the shower, one she was holding in her arm, and one she was holding in her hand. And from then I only remember that, I don't know how many days we stayed in Drancy, only a few days, I don't know how many days. I think we were a week in the Cazerne in St. Etienne, one or two nights in the cells of the Gestapo, and we arrived 3rd June, and we were arrested on 17th May, so, a few days in Drancy. In Drancy there was one woman, she was, she acted, did I tell you in the other tapes about it? No. She acted mad. She had a child of 9 or 10, and when they were filling up the lorries with people, to go, our turn hadn't come yet, she acted mad, real mad, so that they shouldn't put her on the truck. She wasn't actually mad, she acted mad. There was good reason even to be mad, but she acted like she was mad. And eventually they made up the numbers and they just threw her in, and her child, you know, and she didn't come back. We went together, we arrived together, the same time as Robert arrived with his family, she was walking in front of us, with her two children. In the train, in the cattle truck from Drancy to Auschwitz was Janine's parents, her sister, the Hungarian lady that my mother was at the house, with her son, us, it was six, the other people I didn't know. On the floor they had, for the cattle truck, on the floor they had straw, they had a bucket for people if they had to go somewhere, the conditions were simply horrifying, terrible, because it was hot, there was no air, people were panicking, the only window was that little window that you see on a

cattle truck, with bars across, so it didn't open. From time to time they opened up to give some water. I don't remember about food, I only remember people feeling ill, people having to go, that was the beginning. There was no curtain or anything, people had to go and relieve themselves, it was horrible. In fact, it was so hot, and so stifling, and so sticky for so many days, that I was wearing a cotton dress; I remember it tore, you know, from no room, and hot, sweaty. Tore in two in the back so I had nothing even to wear. I think by that time we had no luggage any more.

I was going to ask you if you had anything.

By that time, to Drancy we must have brought, I don't think we brought much, because everybody was arrested in the street, do you remember? We never had luggage.

But you had your red coat.

Yes. That I must have put on when the Gestapo arrested me. The Milice arrested me. I must have taken my coat.

And you must have still had it, because you had it when you arrived in Auschwitz?

That's right, that's how I put it on, because my dress was torn, I put it on. But I can't remember that we had luggage in that train, you know, we were too many people, 125 people in one car, cattle truck. So you could see that nobody could really stretch out, everybody was just, you know, just sitting, squashed together.

And your mother and father just wearing the clothes they were arrested in, and, and,

Yes, yes.

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And David still in the hospital?

Yes, yes,

Clothes,

Whatever he was in, all dressed in whatever they were wearing.

Where did you think you were going?

We didn't know. We didn't know. We had no idea. But as I said, my mother was no optimist. My mother said from the beginning, "that is the end".

But you didn't know that Jews were being exterminated?

No. We, we, we thought that, we knew about Dachau, you know, because it was enough in the news, the concentration camp of some kind. Work camps, and concentration camps, but extermination camps, we didn't know. We hadn't, we hadn't heard about it, or we didn't know. We knew that, we knew that people were being shot, because they showed, they used to show the Resistance, and they tortured the Resistance, and they used to shoot people if they were foreign Jews, we heard about that, but...(INTERFERENCE ON TAPE) Even when we arrived, I told you, Mengele said, "These are going to work, and these are going there".

And all these 125 people in your car, were equally innocent about

Yes, yes, yes.

Do you remember what people talked among themselves, or did people fight among themselves?

Fight, people fought. People were irritable, fighting over space, over hygiene, I mean, that was the first time that people were in such a confined space for so many days in such conditions.

They must have actually been vomiting on each other?

Yes, vomiting, diarrhoea, everything.

And this bucket for the toilet purposes,

That was full, can you imagine, I mean, unless they stopped and emptied it, we lived with that too.

They emptied it sometimes?

Sometimes, they had to, because there was nowhere else to go.

How long was this journey?

Five days, I think, four days. By the time we arrived, and they opened the doors, you know, we didn't know where we were, it was early morning, I think, 6 o'clock in the morning, and all we could see were these men in these striped clothes, saying, "Hurry up, hurry up, hurry up. Don't ask questions. Give the babies to the older women." How did they know? But the Germans were saying, "Hurry up, hurry up." And then we tried to ask, "Where are we?" And they said, they said, "Give the children to the older women." They all said that.

Who? The Sonder Commando?

Yes. The Sonder Commando.

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Were they saying this in German as well, or some other language?

In Yiddish. In Yiddish.

In Yiddish, so that the Germans wouldn't understand.

Yes, they didn't say, they were saying, "Give the children to the older women", they said, as they were running.

That was the only message they tried to pass on?

Yes, yes.

So they were trying to save the lives of the younger women?

Yes, yes. It's the only thing they could do, without being shot themselves. They didn't even say, "Don't be sick", because my father right away, of a heart condition. If Mengele can say, at a stage like that, when I wouldn't leave my mother, he says, "Don't cry", he says, "You are going to work, and your mother is going to be with the children, in another Camp." And as the people were walking to the Crematorium, they had an orchestra there, I told you, playing, the famous march. We were in such a confused state, that you didn't know what to think of, what to say, what it was. You know, you were stunned. You were stunned. You didn't know. Just a group of Nazis staying there, you know, with their batons, and their polished boots, there, "This way, this way, this way." And in a matter of no time, all that was liquidated, you know, then the next train arrived.

Was your father more optimistic than your mother, about what might happen to you?

Yes, I think he was, he was, he didn't realise it, I think, my father brought to the camp his teffilen, and his religious beliefs, that things like this couldn't happen, whilst my mother all through the War, was frightened. She somehow had a premonition. She only kept saying to me, "It's terrible, you know, that you should be, you know, here, on this train."

She said that to you on the train?

Yes, yes. "When you're confined without air, and you like the open air so much, and you like to be outside." And that one woman that came back, that lady from, another one from St. Etienne, a lady, this woman was always crying, you know, she always cried, when we were in the prison, even in the Cazerne, in St. Etienne, she kept crying and saying how hungry she was. So my mother gave her her food, her bread, she gave her her food, my mother. She said, "She is hungrier than I am." But she came back, she came back, she was one of the characters that you would never think, for a moment, is capable of surviving anything. But she came back, she only died two or three months ago. And she was incapable even, to keep herself, from the hygiene point, you know, clean, she is the only one that I saw that there were deep ridges of lice, they made really ridges in her skin, and she kept those ridges, they never went, the ridges of lice on her skin, and she came back. What was so amazing, in a way, was who came back. Some people you never thought would survive a day, and some of those wonderful people who looked healthy and strong, and everything, never made it, never made it. They had the will to live, the ones that made it. Janine saw her regularly, and she had a daughter who was hidden in St. Etienne, and she found her after the War, so she had a little bit of a life. But she was such a hopeless woman, a hopeless woman, I told you, always needed help, she was always crying, and she was always made up like she was going to a carnival, but, but you couldn't miss her.

Odd character. But unfortunately, my mother saw, so black. She was the one who was right. She felt terribly sorry for us children, she felt terrible. I think, I think if she, she felt bad because she was the first one that was arrested, she had all the papers, you know.

Do you think she might have felt a bit guilty?

She felt bad about it, I think. And you couldn't have had a better mother, because what she didn't do to feed us during the War, to make sure we shouldn't go without food, she deprived herself of everything, she didn't count, you know, as long as we were okay. But I think even when we were in the train, she didn't think that really, she said it was the end, on the other hand, she said, "if that war is over, you know, we must do things differently."

She still had some hope?

Yes.

At what point did you all decide to meet in St. Etienne if you, that must have been in the train you must have said that to each other?

Yes, yes, yes. Because originally we came from Sarreguemines, you know, but we said we would meet in St. Etienne.

So you expected to be separated at the least? That you wouldn't all remain together.

We said, whatever happens, we meet again in St. Etienne, because we mentioned it to the Dutch lady, with her baby.

That was the address you gave her?

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Yes. That was the, where we, where we were supposed to meet again, whoever came, whoever. The conditions went from worse to worse, this convoy was bad, and the others got worse, and they got worse, and they got worse.

In what ways?

We didn't arrive, at that stage, with many dead people in our trucks, but as the, the convoy from one camp to the next, every time we came with corpses, you know. People who didn't survive the journey.

And because the journeys were so long, if they died at the beginning of the journey, they were,

They stayed in with us until we arrived. We were together with the corpses. That was terrible. Some of our young friends, you know. It's difficult to imagine, or to realise what it meant, for anybody living a normal life today.

Of course, we get annoyed if we're crowded together on the Underground at the rush hour!

Yes, that's one of the reasons, I'm now very bad when I am in, in crowds, I can't stand it, I can't take it, don't want it any more. Don't want to be pushed about, I don't want to be pressed about, I can't take it, it gives me a terrible feeling, you know, and yet I don't think I'm claustrophobic, I just don't like it. I must say, I never thought that I would one day be free and live normally, and breathe fresh air, and, and, and smile, I think I smiled even when I was there, because I had to keep myself going. But that I could ever be happy or content or whatever. I have that, I think I can never be completely joyful, or completely happy because there is something that always is sad inside me. That, that is there. And it's no use talking about it, because people don't understand what is there. After having

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seen so much, it was like coming from Hell. So much unhappiness To have confronted all that, you know, so much death, death, death. And at the end it had no meaning any more, you know. They were all once lovely people, you see, by the time they died they didn't look like people at all, they were corpses.

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Yes, the 5th.

Might have been the 6th, might have been the 6th.

The 5th or 6th recording session, interviewing Freda Wineman, today is 12th January, 1989.

Well, this is, I think, the sixth interview with Taffy, today is the 12th January, 1989.

I have said, in my tapes, that as far as I remember we arrived on 3rd June, '44, in Birkenau. I have seen another testimony of a friend of mine, Professor Weil, and he thinks, and he says in his paper, that we arrived on 2nd June, '44, this is probably, he is probably right, I only know that it was either my brother's birthday on that day or the following day, but this is not really terribly important, but I thought I must mention it. That convoy, when we arrived, we were all tattooed, and I think it's quite important that I should put my tattoo number down. By that time, they already started with A numbers, because before they were just numbers, but now they put A in front, because there were so many millions that they had already killed. My number is A 7181, and I think my, Janine is either the one after, 82, or 80, but we were tattooed one after the other.

We'd like to have the birth dates of you and your brothers.

Yes. David is the older one, he was born on 15th June, 1922; I was born 16 months later, on 6th September 1923; My brother Armand was born on 3rd June, 1926; and my youngest brother was born on 6th August, 1930. He was the youngest. The one who didn't come back.

Right, we're at the end of our interview now, and you've been listening to the tapes as we've been doing them. Would you like to say how, how it felt to be giving this interview, and what you think of it when you listen to it on tape?

For many many years, I didn't speak about it, I had difficulties even to cope with my own thoughts, which were very painful, and come to terms with it, and at several occasions I have been asked to give a testimony, or give an interview. I think very few people agreed to give a testimony, some people did write books, many books were written about it, but I think it's only after the Reunion in Israel, in 1981, that we were urged that it would be terribly useful and important for us, to try and give a testimony, and many did. Well, it was a very emotional Reunion. I agreed to give an interview to the American, the radio, I think, an interview to a reporter, that is as far that I went, I, I still couldn't speak at length about it. The second interview I gave was in Washington, when we were interviewed with, my, I forgot the name now! My Hungarian friend.

Relly.

Relly, we were interviewed by the Washington television, Channel Five, and I understand, it was on, on that same day, or the same evening, on the television. There we just talked about our episode, how we met in Birkenau, and how, how we were happy that we met again in Israel after all those years. That was also quite painful, I found, to give these interviews, and many survivors did give interviews, and none of them found it very easy. And all these meetings, these Reunions, where everybody was only trying to find out if there were still some relations alive, against all odds. I happened to be in America at the time, when the Lodz Ghetto had a Reunion in the Catskills at the Concord

Hotel, and although my daughter was getting married two days later, I asked to go, just for one night, to see if perhaps somebody had any knowledge of what happened to my family, my father's family in Lodz. They had just disappeared from the map. I thought that our name was an unusual name, but from the people I met, it was as common as Smith in London, and unless I had more details, they couldn't tell me anything about my relations. Only recently, I could see, after a meeting, that Mr. Robert Maxwell and his wife, arranged here in London, that there was a point, that, that so many survivors were not here any more, to give a testimony, and that it became more and more important for future generations, that we should try and put it down, on a tape, or on paper, what we went through, if only to make today's generation, and certainly future generations, aware what can happen to people, and how certain dictators can make people do things that you wouldn't believe are possible, or human, to other humans. And I think that unless children are taught, in school, people are made aware of it, and people are always conscious of it, that it can happen at any time, anywhere, can we avoid another catastrophe. We have kept quiet, many of us, but now we feel that the time has come, and I hope, although I find these sessions, I had, very painful, and I had to dig into my memory all the horrible things that I have tried, not to forget, but not to live with it. I had to try and remember, I had to live through painful times. Horrible times, cruel times. I don't regret that I have done it. I would say it has brought me relief, because we have been badly marked, and we have, we need great strength and courage, just to get on with life, we try very hard, that is the only way we can continue to survive. But we will never forget. We can never forgive the Germans for what they did to our people, and to millions of others who didn't agree with their way of life, or that dictatorship. We, even today, I cannot talk to Germans, nor visit Germany. I can, I cannot say that I go round with hatred, but my heart bleeds when I think what they did

to our people, and I cannot look them, any of them, in the eye. The younger generation I don't necessarily find that I have to be bitter, vis-a-vis them, but I don't see that I need to frequent them, or have anything to do with them, because unfortunately, I always think, maybe their father, their uncle, or any of their relations, are culprits in the extermination of the Jews, and therefore I keep my distance. So I like to leave this tape just saying that I hope you will find it, I wouldn't say useful, but important, to relate to the future generations, and they will take out of it, a lesson for the future.

When you listen to these tapes, are you surprised to hear yourself speaking in such a calm way?

I feel I have to be very careful when I am speaking to the tapes, because if I dig a little bit further, I would only cry and be incapable of telling the story. I have to keep it at a certain level. I must say that when I listened to the tapes myself, I sometimes cried, but I tried to make it, I don't know, I find it all so difficult for Taffy, who is my interviewer, to listen to, through all these horrible stories, and I don't want to make it more difficult, it is difficult. It is difficult to relate, it is difficult also to listen to, it is painful to listen to, I am sure.

We want to hear the truth, even if it is painful.

Yes, well, I have told the truth. I have only told the truth, and the truth, even the way I depicted, I think for somebody that hasn't lived through it, it will be difficult even to imagine it, how brutal and how cruel it was, it is beyond human imagination, so I hope that they will just try, just try to understand.

You mentioned to me that you had to ask your doctor for some sedatives.

Yes, yes, I thought I needed it, because I had then, again, some recurring nightmares, which I hadn't had for a little while, and I went to see my doctor, I said, "Maybe you can help me, and give me some sedative, just to help me to get over that period." And it does help, it does help, it takes something just to keep me calm. And more composed, perhaps.

You also have had a new nightmare in this period of the interview?

Yes, I don't know why I had that new nightmare, it was all so horrible, but I felt I was again in a cell, and I was again naked, cold, and hungry, and forlorn, and when I woke up, I was absolutely exhausted from it. These are the things that come back if you speak about these experiences. They recur. It probably was only one of the very earlier ones, because the only time I was actually in a cell, was in the cell of the Gestapo, and that still left me a mark, they were the early days, and I'm also marked about that experience. It's, it's, it showed, over the, over the several interviews that we're all badly marked by our experience. We live with it. We have to. What can we do otherwise?

I think it's been especially hard for you because you've kept it in. You said, even with your husband, he didn't want you to speak about it, because he wanted you to make a new life, and he suggested that you have your number, your tattoo removed.

Yes, he was very much for it, because when I got married, it was 1950, which were still early days, and I still had these recurrent nightmares, and I used to scream and I used to sit up, and I used to run, I used to be wet with perspiration because I was running, so he suggested, he didn't want me to talk about and he said, "Maybe you should have your number

operated on, and you shouldn't have to live with it, and try and make a new life." And after he died, I certainly didn't speak about it, because I had so many other problems. I had to keep at first, the Holocaust to myself. And I had new problems to face, and therefore, and I lived in England, I lived in England, where people were I wouldn't say, ignorant completely, but ignorant of the real tragedy what happened on the Continent. So therefore, I never spoke to anybody about it. I didn't find neither listeners, people didn't like to hear sad stories, they had just gone through a War, they didn't want to listen to sad stories. They all wanted to get on with life, I suppose.

And you felt they wouldn't be able to understand, even if you did?

Yes, it would have been terribly difficult, I found, for them to understand, because I mentioned even in the early days, that, when I was in the Camp, if nobody believes me, I can understand. If nobody believes me after the War, I can understand, and you could only really relate to another person that went through all this terrible tragedy, that they could perhaps understand you, but even when I met afterwards, in France, people who had gone through the Camps, they rarely spoke about it. On the contrary, you could only see in their eyes, that their eyes were always sad, you couldn't really, we didn't talk about it, but looking into their eyes, you could see there was that tragedy behind it. It was too painful, people couldn't talk, just couldn't talk.

And you said to me that you think the Jerusalem Conference could not have taken place earlier than 1981.

No, I don't think so. It couldn't have taken place for many reasons. When we came out, we had to first try and recover, physically, a little. It took years and years. Many of us

were young, so it was a time we also wanted to marry, get married, marry and to have a family, and to have a normal life. People were struggling, number one, to make a new life, to earn a living, to get on with life, to have children, and therefore, they were fully occupied, they were fully occupied with every day life, and they also suffered, but they suffered, and it was too painful, it was just too painful. People could not talk, and couldn't relate these horrible things, they just couldn't talk about it, so it took 36 years after the War, and then it's only when all these people from all round the world came to Jerusalem, it was doubly emotional because it was Jerusalem, and it was the first meeting, not to be repeated. It was unique in itself, unique, it can never happen, it can't be the same again. It was the first time that people were willing to meet again, because sometimes, when we saw another person with a number, we avoided them even, in the beginning, because we found it too painful to speak about it. So we just looked at each other, and we never spoke. And that was the first time that we were together in Israel, a thing we never dreamt of. A dream that was realised, and on top of it, survivors came with their wives, with their children, proud to have now a lovely family. A lot of them brought their children, they wanted their children to witness what had happened to them. I was still at the stage where I didn't have the heart to have my children to witness it. I still wanted to see how I will cope with other survivors. And I must say, it was a very disturbing experience, because I remember after the meeting, which took a week in Jerusalem, I went for one week to the Sharon Hotel, to rest, and I have very close relations in Israel, and I didn't want to see anybody. I had to just be left alone. It had taken out so much of me that I just had to be left alone. And slowly and gradually, you had to come back to everyday living, and the second, the second big meeting in Washington, which was mostly of Polish Jews, who, some hadn't come to Israel, or couldn't make it for different

reasons, that I, as a French deportee, I was very interested and very moved by the stories of these Polish Jews who survived many many years of ghetto life. Some that had been shot, but somehow had survived under the heaps of corpses, and, and hid in the forest and survived later. There were some terrific stories that I heard there. So I personally, I never talked about my own experience, I was only interested in these peoples' experiences, and the pride and joy of that big Conference was that this time, people came already, the actual survivors, with their children who had done well in America, had professional people, lawyers, doctors, very proud mothers, and their grandchildren. They already came with prams with grandchildren, so that was so wonderful to see, that now were the parents, children, and grandchildren. So what you could do is sit there and cry, and just look at these wonderful people who survived that, and you thought that you got away lightly, because you were only under Occupation, and one year in Concentration Camps, but these people had gone four, five, six years, through ghettos, and finished off in Concentration Camps, and you wondered how they did it. Their families had been shot, whole communities had been shot, and here they were. Quite amazing! Quite amazing! In America they do things very well, they had tried to also find relations that had disappeared, they had big computers where you could feed in all the details to find relations. Unfortunately, I only heard of one case which didn't finish well, because it was one brother that found a sister, or a sister that found a brother, and the emotion was so great that the person collapsed, had to be taken to hospital, and unfortunately died. So that was a terrible experience. Because through the computers, nobody found anybody, so what did they do? They went to another, another big room, and they had a microphone there, so they came over, and in Yiddish, that was the language that most people understood, they asked, "Did you know this and this person, who lived in this and this street, who went to this and this school, maybe any

of you, because we are 15,000 people there, maybe you knew somebody, or you heard about somebody, or you've seen him somewhere, could you please come forward." Unfortunately, except for that one person, nobody came forward. Nobody found anybody. Perhaps a school friend, but relations, nobody found a relation. In Israel, two brothers found themselves, because one had gone to South Africa and one to Australia, and one had changed his name, but when you came to these Reunions, they ask you to put your name down, exactly the way you used to spell it, so therefore some people found themselves again, but this, I only heard about these two brothers. And the same at the Lodz meeting, in the Catskills. They all came from Lodz, 15 different countries they'd arrived, they all tried to find relations. There were great joys, and wonderful smiles and laughing, but it was only school friends, or neighbours, or somebody they knew, but no relations, nobody found any relations.

They did a good job.

Yes. A wonderful job. Anything else?

So you're glad you've done this interview?

I am, the word "glad" is probably not the right word. I'm glad I met you, but I think I feel relieved, perhaps. Because I knew at some stage, I should really do it, I didn't know at what stage I would be able to do it, and so I feel ...

End of F149 Side B

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I feel that if it will help, in any way, help the new generations, the future generations, to live a better life, not to have to go through another Holocaust, that is certainly worthwhile having done it. I will have to try and get it back, into my subconscious, because you cannot live with it. I must say that when I travelled in Greece, I met in Delphi, a man who was a deportee from Salonika, and the son noticed that I had a number, and he said "My father was in Auschwitz. I would like him to meet you." So he came out, he shook hands with me, and he said, "Pleased to meet you", he said, "Please, just get on with life, enjoy yourself." He didn't say any more. And that's what one has to do. You just have to get on with life, and look forward. You cannot live with the past. You cannot live with the past. It troubles you all the time, but you cannot live with it. You have to look forward, and that's what I'm trying to do, all the time.

But you also haven't tried to avoid contact with the past? You have gone to these Conferences, and you do watch films on the Holocaust, and read books,

Yes, yes, yes.

You haven't tried to completely submerge it.

No. Because I felt sometimes, that I had to be, in a way, true to myself, I had to meet with the people that understand me, people that I have something in common with, because I often feel I live here rather more in a cocoon, where you cannot speak, and sometimes, you have to just meet with people, even if you don't speak a lot about it, but just meet them. I read, I read books, I follow programmes on television, and I don't try to avoid it. My children thought at one time it was very bad for me, and they tried

to not let me watch it, they said, "It's no good. You don't have to watch it." But I always wanted to see how they are trying to project it to the outside world, you know, if it's true to what I saw. To what I actually witnessed, and that I found very important. And when I read books, I can see that, I don't read many books about it, I have the books. I find that everybody feels very much like I do, you know, they've written the books, they've lived with it too, they probably feel better after they have written it, but it hasn't taken the scar away, you know, it has left that scar, it's still wide open, it's not, it will never heal, it's there, it's there.

What have you concluded about these documentaries and films from the Holocaust, are they fairly accurate?

Well, the documentaries are usually accurate, and the films are often a little bit romanticised, you know, to make it so that people can watch it. You see, people cannot cope with such horrors, they cannot cope with such deaths, cope with such bestiality, so when they put a little bit of romance in it, you know, a little love story, then people can at least watch it. Some gets lost, but a lot gets gained. At least they look at it, and that's important too. There was that film that was broadcast, last year, what was it called.

The American Television?

Yes, that production.

'Holocaust'?

You know, when they showed that love story in it. Well, it is really far too soft, you know, it, it, but it made it possible for people to watch. So whatever they, the little they saw, did at least make them aware what happened. If you would show all the time documentaries, with heaps of

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corpses, or Germans killing and shooting, people would not look, they wouldn't look, they just can't look, they can't cope with it, so they, only even last night in the documentary, you know, they have flashbacks of Jews being herded into these trucks, you know, the trains, and they have shooting going on, but they, they try to show today and yesterday, but not too much you see, people will turn the television off. They say, "We can't watch that."

But you felt all along that people didn't really want to hear your stories.

Yes, yes. Most people don't want to hear. Most people. And even when I came back from the Conference in Israel, I really talked to my WIZO group, and I try to give them a nice picture of the meeting. I didn't even go in to anything that was sad, very sad, but everybody looked so upset, and so sad, they were crying, that I find it difficult to talk to them. I find it difficult to, to talk to people in the real, in the true term, what really happened, you know. I cannot. People cannot take it. Young people perhaps better, you know, perhaps better, because I remember talking to the young television crew there, in Washington. I only wanted to see if they believed me, because I said, "Tell me, can you believe our story", that was only the Reunion with Relly, but they could, I could see that they would willingly sit for hours and just listen to us two. I don't know if they were fascinated, that's not the word, but they could, they were sitting there, you know, they weren't missing a word, they were just wanting to hear more and more. But probably young people are willing to at least hear it. Hopefully, my tapes will come over, certain of the tapes, anyway, from the Holocaust, they will want to listen to it, so that will be already good. If it helps in any way.

I hope it will.

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Yes. I don't know what else you would like to put on.

Is there anything you would like to add?

The only thing I would like to add is that I do, I do enjoy meeting people who have an understanding. I do now also appreciate true friendship, true friendship, sincere friendship, people who take you for what you are, and the same with me, I, I only really, I am interested in people that are not superficial. That have a deeper understanding of life. But also that have a zest for life, because I think you have to keep a zest for life. I think if you wouldn't have had that zest for life, you would not have survived, you see. There must have been a sparkle of that all the time. And as I said, I, I wouldn't call myself deeply religious, but a believer. I always believed that there is a God, I still do, and that helped me.

Do you believe that God looked after you personally during that year?

I seem to have, I have had, during the Holocaust, and since then, I have had, you know, very very trying times, and I always, "Oh, God, don't let me down. Don't let me down. You didn't let me down when it was harder." I am, I have to believe, you understand? I am holding on, you know, like a person that is drowning, I am holding on to all sorts of things. So I think you are fortunate if you are a believer. And I think you are so much poorer if you are not a believer, because what do you do? Where do you turn?

Yes. And you also feel that, the fact that you weren't alone during that year, you always had Janine from the first day to the last day, and you had two other,

Yes, two, yes, we were four, and, Marcelline, there was Marcelline, and there was Suzanne, who were always, we were

lost, you know. I mean, there were different selections, and they were on different blocks, and then there were, you could perhaps not find them again. So we tried to keep together. And we still see each other. I mean, Janine being a sister-in-law, I certainly see her. Marcelline I see in Paris, I always see her in Paris. And Suzanne lives in St. Etienne, from time to time I see her if I go down to St. Etienne. She was not my favourite, unfortunately, but she is doing very well.

But you must feel that in a way, these three women understand you better than anyone else in the world ever could?

Yes, sure. Sure. We don't need to speak, no. We only say, "How do you feel?" And we are only interested if their health is more or less all right, and, and morale, the morale is not always good. The morale is the thing that goes down the most. I think quite a few take, take tranquillisers, to cope, and now, apparently, it's getting worse, you see. As I say, we have more time to think, we are getting probably a little frailer than we were, and maybe that is why there is a lot of depression amongst the survivors at the moment. And harder to cope, harder to cope. Marcelline keeps herself very busy with filming, you know, they are doing films, and unless she works day and night, you know, she cannot cope, she is very bad at coping, in fact.

So she just,

Works, works, works. And Janine has, has also bad moments. Then she goes and visits her children, and grandchildren, that keeps her, the children are very good, you know, they ring up, they come and they stop, they go down to visit her, and make sure that her, but she is also physically not well, not well at all.

For reasons having to do with her Holocaust experiences?

Yes, you see, we all have, we suffer now more of back trouble, that's coming now, back, really badly, most people have, I mean, people of our age group have trouble, but really there is a lot of trouble here. There is also stomach and intestine trouble which has never been cured. There is psychological trouble, because it can be also set off by psychological trouble, because they have difficulty to cope with their, with that, and physically, they get affected, you know, psycho-somatic, and it's very difficult. I found last time, they have all very great difficulties in France. I ran away. I said, "My God," I said, "Oh, that's bad", I said, "I kept hearing, now it's coming out."

But you try very hard to keep yourself healthy, you swim every morning.

Yes, I do go swimming, and I try to keep, I try...agile...to keep fit. I go for cures, you know, so that my back and other troubles keep a little bit at bay, and when I feel that I get depressed, then I travel. I travel. I go back to France, or I travel abroad, somewhere, I do something to get out of that situation. If I feel I cannot cope. But I try to, to make the best of the facilities in London, I have some very good friends, which help a lot, which helps a lot indeed. People who are willing to listen to you, you know, on little troubles. But I wouldn't say that it is easy. It is not easy.

When you get depressed sometimes, is it set off by some incident, or you can't pinpoint the reason for it?

It does happen, it happens when you have to cope with certain difficulties, you know, of everyday life, you know, problems that occur in everyday life.

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So it becomes the straw that breaks the camel's back.

Yes, yes, yes. That's very difficult to cope with problems, big problems. If anything happens now, we are not as good as we were, you see. I suppose there is so much a person can cope with, and no more. And if you don't want to break down, you know, and mentally, and physically, you have to really fight, fight it off somehow. And that's what I try to do continually!

You try also to keep in control of your environment,

Yes, yes, very much so. Very much so. Sometimes it is at a price, you know, that self, that control, that self-control all the time, it's at a price. But you know, if you let go, and you let go, you cannot afford to do. Because you don't want to be a burden on your children or anybody else. That's easily done. But you don't know how long you will be able to do it either, do you. You don't know if you can do it forever and ever. I hope I can, but I don't know.

You feel a bit precarious?

Yes. Yes. And that is a message which is difficult to

Convey?

Convey, yes. Very difficult to convey. People always think that I seem to cope marvellously.

You certainly look as if you're coping marvellously.

You understand? Yes. But I have great difficulty of keeping the balance. I mean, like that. That's why also the tape, when I listen to it, I find that I'm terribly in control, that I cannot hear my emotions come through, but if

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I do, I break down, you see, it is just a matter of balance. Just a matter of balance. I suppose we have it more than other people, you know, but I suppose there are many people who had a normal life who have these difficulties but we had it probably a lot more than other people. And I do admire people, you know, like Simone Weil who took up this very big positions, you know, and some others, you know, who were coping with all that. But I'm sure they have their problems, you know. They have their problems too. But through their work. They, they're so involved that they can forget, they cannot forget, but they can at least be totally occupied. And if they have a nice husband at home, which is an understanding person, and a support, it helps a great deal. Unfortunately, I am not in that position. And that has been a great loss to bear. Somebody that at least was there to give you some support. As I say, C'est la vie! Anyway, it has been great to be with you, to have the interview with you.

It's been a privilege for me.

And I hope we keep in touch.

I hope so too.

And I hope there are many people like you around!

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END OF INTERVIEW