

Alice Adler, Survivor, 4/11/1986

Q: This is Fern Niven for the National Council of Jewish Women. I am at the home of Mrs. Alice Adler in Sarasota, Florida. Today is April 11th, 1986. Mrs. Adler has kindly agreed to be interviewed and to talk with us about her experiences in the Holocaust but before we get to that point I would like it very much Mrs. Adler if you would tell us something about your early childhood so we have a picture of you as an entire person not just during those terrible years. Do you just want to tell if you had brothers and sisters, what your parents did for a living and describe a little bit of your early life.

A: I was born in Budapest, Hungary. My parents were born in Austria and my upbringing was practically bi-lingual because disciplined I was in German and school was in Hungarian. I had two brothers who were both designers, the same way as my parents were.

Q: Designers of what?

A: Designers of women's wear and my parents founded a very prestigious women's wear establishment in 1906 and it was one of the finest in the city. We got a marvelous education. My parents were very very adamant about studies in languages, in art, in music which later came in very very handy in different ways. We were planning to leave the country first when Hitler over-ran Austria.

Q: Did you have – how much formal education did you have?

A: In Hungary you have four elementary schools which is like high school and I had four years of art school. Partly in Hungary and partly in Vienna.

Q: Did you have much religious training? Was religion practiced in your home?

A: In our home religion was very important foundation. My father was very religious. He was, we had Shabbos, we observed the candle lighting ceremonies. We observed all the High Holidays but what is more important we lived a Jewish life, we identified with a city, with a country being an Austrian-Hungarian monarchy, part of it. It was, it had a deeply rooted anti-Semitism so from our earliest age in school we had encountered [it].

Q: Can you describe - because it is hard for people in this country to comprehend – can you describe an anti-Semitic experience that you recall from your childhood?

A: As a young child I remember my two brothers coming home their heads bleeding, thoroughly shaken up. That was the day that they both went enrolled to the university which had a so-called numerous Klaus which means that a certain amount of Jews are only allowed.

Q: A quota system?

A: Like a quota system and [blank space], I mean they were fighting, they were expelling the Jewish students, they couldn't even register so when they came home my father said I don't want to endanger your life, you're going to learn a trade where you will not be segregated and that's what happen. Both of them became designers.

Q: And what about you? Did you have some similar experiences?

A: My earliest experience was one day when I run home from school and never wanted to go back because the children tore my clothes and my hair and they kept saying you're a dirty Jew, you're a dirty Jew and I came home and I was hysterical and I asked my mother why do they say this to me and she said show me your hand. You see how dirty you are, go wash your hands and face and just forget about it because that's all they meant but I could not forget about it. I have had a deep resentment to be singled out. There were very few Jewish children in the school.

Q: And that wasn't a very satisfactory explanation was it?

A: At that time I was about 8 years old and to a small child a mother just can't explain the bigotry of the country. She just wanted to make it very insignificant.

Q: I would imagine then under those circumstances you would have selected your friends and acquaintances only among Jewish people to avoid this kind of bigotry?

A: I was very selective, strangely enough not whether it's a Jewish person or non-Jewish person but whether they met the standard I set for myself and exchanged the same likes and dislikes and excitement for the beautiful things we believed in and I had quite a number of non-Jewish friends. I had quite a number of non-Jewish friends, I almost

felt that I am spreading the impression of this is how we are, you see you must get to know us, you must get to learn. I instinctively tried to build a bridge.

Q: Feeling is they got to know you they would understand you were like themselves?

A: We are people and I thought it would be better to react to animosity with civilize way and I succeeded.

Q: That's wonderful. When Hitler came into power in Germany, what was the reaction of your family or yourself or people that you knew in terms of your own lives?

A: Naturally we thought it was a tremendous tragedy even though it was far away you could feel instinctively that our lives were going to be affected and it will never be the same. Life is never going to be the same. But really it hit us hard when my mother and father's families in 1938 after the Anchluss in Austria started to be deported.

Q: Please explain Anchluss because a lot of people are not familiar with that term.

A: In 1938 the Austria government was overthrown by Hitler. The troops marched in and little by little they overtook the entire country with great jubilation by the Austrians. It was a country where anti-Semitism was running rampant already under Franz Joseph and all the other Hapsburgs emperors. When our uncles and aunts and cousins started to disappear on my mother and father's side, that's when it really hit home and we started to talk about how we could leave and make a new life in America. It was just talk because it was a tremendous decision; it's like planning your own execution. You are finishing your life and it's up to you.

Q: It sounds like other than the anti-Semitism, you had a rather secure, financially secure life.

A: We had a very secure life under circumstances by you really never knew when new laws are going to be coming in effect to appease the German government because we were one of the Axis countries and therefore it was that we were never really secure.

Q: How old were you at that time of the Anchluss?

A: At the Anschluss, I was 28 years old?

Q: Were you married at that time?

A: I was married and had a very successful business and right after the Anschluss.

Q: How long had you been married?

A: I was married three years and Jewish young men were rounded up and sent with the Hungarian government's consent, sent to German borders where they have to pick land mines before the German troops were marching in to a certain area and of course from about 25 to 30,000 young men only 2 or 3,000 came back. One of them was my husband.

Q: He returned from this experience?

A: He returned.

Q: That would be almost like a miracle?

A: It was almost like a miracle.

Q: Did you have children?

A: We had no children which I was very very happy about. It sounds strange but would I have, going ahead of my story, would I have had a child I wouldn't be alive today.

Q: I have had other people say exactly the same thing.

A: How can you separate yourself. Facing danger is one thing but to separate yourself from loved ones which was a favorite pastime for the Germans. When you would show any kind of attachment to a person that would be the first one to be separated.

Q: Okay, so when did your-, you said you talked about leaving and coming to the United States? What happened after that? Did you just talk?

A: After, after we have faced this possibility of getting out of the country, we have talked with many other Jewish families who have traced relatives in America and by sheer coincidence some people with whom we were connected in business had relatives in Bronx, New York State,

one of the boroughs of New York City who lived in the Bronx and would sponsor people.

Q: In those days you had to have a guarantee?

A: You have to have a guarantee and that made it very difficult. Because people didn't have \$15,000 just to take out of the bank and give to a person which was very justified by it just couldn't be done. We got two sponsors.

Q: People who you knew?

A: People who knew the people we knew in business. They vouched for us that we are trustworthy and decent hardworking people. And it was very important when you get here that you should not be a burden to the government. Because of that he got a passport and we had some connections through a company which run boats once every week from the harbor, it was an American outfit. And the captain could get us across if we bought a ticket. Which we did.

Q: For who?

A: For my mother and my brother and myself. I had a younger brother who came out to America in 1939 in March to the World's Fair. He was a fur designer and he had a very special article which they were very much interested in. At the time that we planned he was just on a business trip. Friends in America advised him to try to be able to stay because it looked very bad in Europe.

With our passports and our tickets mother, my older brother and I arrived in Paris leaving Budapest with a, we arrived in Paris like we were going to an ordinary business trip. We used to do that twice a year. We did not want to burn up the bridges because we were not really sure whether our undertaking would be successful. And we were right in anticipating the problems because in the beginning of August a young attorney, a French woman whom we had consulted said it looks very bad, it looks like there is a concentration of German troops on the Polish [border?] and American authorities have already notified people who lived in Paris that they should be careful with their plans and she advised us to make sure that our reservations were valid otherwise it could be difficult if war should break out to get away.

Q: And your father was still there and your husband was still there?

A: My father died when I was 18 years old and I must say that fortunately he was not buried in a marked grave. I was privileged to go every Yartzheit and pray by his grave until I was in Hungary.

Q: And your husband?

A: My husband was in Hungary and he was quite ill after coming back from his experience with the Germans and he was really just taking care of his health looking out for investments. It looked like I have to change my ticket and my mother's ticket because our most important concern was that she should get away because an older person and after we secured her passage my brother left and I would be the third one to leave but my boat ticket was for the Bremen and it was a German boat anchored in the harbor and that very morning when I was suppose to board the ship there was radio news interrupting the regular program was the Germans had won the Polish border and the Second World War had begun so anybody with visitors visas could not sail as the boat was confiscated by the French government. There was no guarantee how people with a visitor's visa could come back after six months, it was only valid for six months. And therefore the Americans have made it clear that people holding visitor's visas could not enter America.

Q: Even though these people in the Bronx had guaranteed that you would not be a burden?

A: It made no difference.

Q: You said that part of the reason you did not burn your bridges behind you was because you were not sure that your plan would work. Also if you had liquidated your business and made it clear that you were going to leave the country permanently, do you think that you would have been allowed to do that?

A: You could sell property at that time yes, and you could have somebody whom you trusted to tell, you handle my possession I am going and be a confidant but there was nobody, you could not trust even your oldest employee and people whom you have been dealing with because you were a Jew and maybe they had been nice to you in spite of the fact and maybe they would have felt that eventually they would own everything you have owned and worked for. You just couldn't do it, and our instinct dictated to and see what you can do which was the right decision. Although my mother who was 18 days on the high seas, the boat was torpedoed several times, she finally arrived in America.

Q: With your brother?

A: With my brother. It was very interesting that until Hungary officially didn't declare war against the Americans until 1942 after Pearl Harbor, we could write to each other but I'm getting ahead of my story.

Q: Well, I interrupted you. You go ahead.

A: Yes. The war broke out and there was no way for me to leave and I wanted

Q: You went back to Budapest?

A: Right. I wanted to go back but the French authorities did not allow you to pass the border unless you have a ticket paid up all the way to Hungary. The ticket office would not sell you a ticket unless you had a visa so this meant you are allowed to leave, they didn't call it a crime in France, the authorities allowed you to leave. It took me four endless months before the traffic police issued an exit visa for me.

During these four months I have sold all my clothing, I have sold my wedding band, I was getting support from the attorney who we knew bought my ticket. I finally finally in a total blackout. I left Paris the city of light which I will never forget as long as I live. I arrived on the Italian border, everything was lit up in contrast to the total darkness that we left in France. It was really a magnificent experience, people total strangers on a platform holding up steaming spaghetti and food and drink to the people who arrived from France and we had to have a very brief passport check and visa check.

Q: Even though Italy was a fascist country, it was still?

A: Yes, yes, but it was not not officially declared war. I arrived back to Budapest and although I felt it was a very wise decision to have left everything intact as much as we could I was shattered by being separated from my family. At the same time by the time I got back, my first husband was again in the army, he had to join even through he was not totally well, they found jobs, menial job for Jewish young men to do. I was totally alone facing the situation from 1940 to 1944.

Q: What happened during those years?

A: During those years I conducted my business and I conducted my mother's and brothers' business and eventually sold it. My business was a very successful fashion boutique and in spite of the fact everybody knew about being Jewish or what have you, I had many German customers because I speak fluent German and it seems that they liked what I was doing and it was not so horrible to support my shop. When the day came that you have to wear the yellow star that's when it started to be very bad.

Q: When was this?

A: I can tell you the date exactly because it's indelible in my mind. It was 1944, March 18, suddenly German tanks appeared in front of the Parliament which was a big plaza and tanks were all over the city and people who we thought were our friends suddenly had swastikas on their arms and came into stores and distributed the yellow stars and told you what restrictions you had. The third day after this taking over of Budapest I got a notification from the Gestapo and without a further hearing, without ever allowing me to look back or take any of my possessions, just the way I was dressed, huh, I had to follow this man.

Q: Who came to your home?

A: Who came to my home very early in the morning. They had a habit of getting there when it shakes you up enough. I was interned two days in a Rabbinate.

Q: What's a Rabbinate?

A: A Rabbinate is a school, a religious school attached to the Temple and where they conduct education for children.

Q: A religious school?

A: Yes. Two days later we were put into vans and driven out to the edge of the city and we saw maybe 15 or 20 freight cars. We were put into the cars and the train started.

Q: How many hundreds or thousands of people were involved at that time?

A: Frankly, I would not be able to tell you because when you see a disaster like this you don't really rationalize what is going around you, you just summon all your power, will power to hold on. An enormous

amount of people, like a whole city was emptied out. The freight cars which would be probably for 35 or 40 animals got packed solid with maybe over a hundred people some of them only could stand or they changed standing or sitting on the ground and a very, very agonizing long trip which must have lasted for days and days and days. We already knew when we arrived that it was Auschwitz of course. We knew that once entering the freight train.

Q: There was no way out?

A: No windows.

Q: What did you do in terms of food, in terms of water, in terms of sanitation?

A: There was no water, no sanitation, no food. By the time they opened those freight cars, there were more dead than alive. The stench and the screaming and the yelling in the morning is something that when I'm alone and think about it, I just have to feel that it was "bashert" [destined] for me to live. It was to survive.

Q: But you managed? Then what, when you got

A: When we got, when we got, when the doors were opened and we were falling out and pushed out and shoved out and beaten with sticks and whips and had to stand up whoever could stand up. There was a great big line of people watching us coming in, who probable just came back from some kind of work. And later on did we know when they were screaming EAT, EAT, EAT what they really meant no matter how bad it was what they gave you it would mean life but it didn't mean anything then. That was the time at the arrival when they separated

Q: The selection process?

A: By the grace of God I was alone. After the arrival there were no barracks to house us because they were totally filled.

Q: What time of year was this?

A: That was 1944 end of April, the beginning of May.

Q: In the spring?

A: In the spring. Cold nights, very cold nights and excruciating hot sun during the day. We were actually there, planted on that lawn for ten days or that's what they said, it might have been ten days outdoors with one sheet of clothing which they threw to us. Day and night for maybe two days not even water. Mind you we had no food or water on the train. Many people were totally dehydrated and died. Standing in the sun, being soaked by the rain, drying up, day and night, day and night.

Finally one barrack opened up which was the C Lager. Lager means a concentration of many barracks. Each and every barrack, concentration of barracks had a special importance. Those in C were for extermination. Those who were in D, we found all of this out later, were prepared to be shipped out eventually for forced labor. Arriving in C, Barrack C, we have gotten doused. Where we had no way of, where we have no way of any hygiene except we were told where the outhouses were, about 65 or 70 holes in planks of wood in a big barracks guarded by Germans watching us going and taking care of our biological needs which was one of the most humiliating and degrading experiences but of course that was just one of them.

The Germans had a very peculiar sadistic way of eating into your pride, into your dignity step by step by step. You thought this is it, they can't do any worse, what else can they possibly do to destroy me but every day brought something else. And you felt, I can't take it, I just have to think back to how much more I had to take.

Q: What did you do there? Did they put you to, first of all you said you were in an extermination barracks?

A: That was the extermination barracks. About two or three weeks later, I happened to be fortunate to meet Dr. Mengele who was overlooking this last transfer where I belonged if there is anyone strong enough to be sent out. That was the so-called selection where I was standing naked with many hundred others raising my left arm. We had to raise our left arm because that was showing whether our ribs showed under the skin. If we were too thin there was no point in sending us out and giving us a piece of bread and taking us to forced labor because we could not stand it. I was selected and in about two more weeks I was sent with many others this time already with a dress and a coat and shoes.

Q: During the selection you were naked?

A: Yes, we have just one sheet of clothes which was thrown at us and we have to put it on and whatever shoes you could find because shoes were very important if you have an infection on your foot, you're going to the gas chamber.

Q: And all the other people who were in this barracks were exterminated?

A: Several of them came from that trip I was on. We were sent out to Sudeten Deutschland which was occupied Czechoslovakia by the Germans. It was a very highly industrial area with many factories still working full steam producing aviation parts. I was sent to [blank space] which was in the high mountains in the Alps totally secluded although later on we found out that the American Air Force knew exactly which factory had forced labor because we were never bombed. Everything around us was bombed and fires were raging and our factory never got a hit.

Q: And you feel they did that selectively to preserve your lives?

A: Later on we found out after the liberation that they had a complete intelligence network of everything which was going on.

Q: Were the conditions there any better?

A: The conditions were equally bad because we got one piece of bread and some brown liquid which we couldn't identify what it was. That was our total intake for 16 hours a day of work. After the 16 hours we have to walk to our living quarters and walk back in the morning at the crack of dawn. Standing, I made a mistake because they were selecting machines to work on according to your background, studies, etc. and they gave me five machines to work on, an excruciating job because the machines were running horizontally back and forth and sort of had a very hypnotic effect on you especially not being fed very much.

It was crucial to produce a certain amount of pieces which we had to do. If you didn't you sabotaged everything. If they counted not enough pieces in your output, they sent you back to Auschwitz. I was there until 1945, March the 14th. At that date some French prisoners who worked in the camp too in this labor camp and sort of walked around freely because they had been prisoners since 1939 working with the Germans, have let us know that the Allied forces are nearing and it is not too much long that we are going to be liberated.

Q: Did you believe them?

A: I believed them because one bright day around 12 o'clock noon instead of giving us our daily ration, we were assembled in a courtyard, that never happened before during the day. We were always assembled after working. We were counted and re-counted and had to march to a railroad station where they took us into freight cars again. The previous day in the washroom I bumped into a German auxiliary who was a supervisor of work and in a very typically Viennese accent she said to me you are going tomorrow to Nuremberg where there are still several crematoriums working and with that she left.

Q: What a terrifying thing to hear?

A: There were hundreds of soldiers, little 14, 15 year old kids with machine guns and police dogs guarding this railroad station. And in spite of all this I had a sudden impulse that I am going to survive and I just can't tell you how thick with suspense it is. My dead father prayed for me which I prayed with him all along.

Q: Did you still have some faith in God? After all this?

A: Yes. Because of that I'm here. I feel that a very, very strong guiding force whatever you want to call it was there. I jumped out of the train which went to the crematories. Half an hour after the departure, the train was going very slowly up a hill and I looked around in the freight car and there was a small opening. I climbed up on a chair, today I don't believe I did it. I put my head out and I pushed myself out of that opening. This vent was probably meant for fresh air for the animals but before I knew it I was falling out on the embankment and I saw the tail lights of the train go. There wasn't a shock, there was nothing. I was there by myself.

Q: This was in the daytime?

A: That was at night. We were assembled at noon and by the time they counted and re-counted and put us up into the trains, it was getting dark.

Q: And here you had just fallen out of the train in the countryside all by yourself?

A: All by myself not really knowing what am I to do now. Is this freedom, is this something now you are on your own, it's your decision because I almost forgot what it is to make a decision. I was just a link and little

by little first I prayed. I remember very distinctly first I prayed and I wasn't afraid at all. I started to get up and examined by body thinking rashly did I break anything. Am I all right? And I tried to walk. The next feeling was that maybe, maybe I have to walk back where I came, where they assembled us and my instinct was right because those French prisoners who saw the train going out had a convoy. They were combing the neighborhood morning, noon and night looking for maybe they would find a survivor. And...

Q: To what purpose were they looking for survivors?

A: they had no other purpose but to save them. They were in a similar situation as we were but they have been very, very important to the factory. They worked there, they were all engineers. They had been taken in 1939 when the Germans overrun the Maginot line so they used them. Now I was liberated, now I was taken care of by the French prisoners who took me back to their commando. They had an underground commando; they had a free radio Europe station.

I was told later that I collapsed; I didn't come to for several hours because at that point I could let myself go. They were wonderful. They were caring for me. They tried to feed me which was very unsuccessful because I simply couldn't eat. I forgot how and they told me about the advancement of the Eisenhower forces. There was a time the Allies could not decide which part of Germany they would occupy, the British, the French, the Russians and I only knew that since Hungary was now occupied by Russia I didn't want to go back. All I wanted to go was to America. In fact I many times said when I was still in Auschwitz I know I'm not going to die, I'm going to America because I was so sure.

Q: You really had a strong sense of your own survival and your own destiny.

A: Here I was now with the French prisoners. They all had documents, I had nothing. I was 70 pounds and I was a very sick girl and they said to me we are leaving as soon as it is possible to join the American occupied territories because we are going to be repatriated as we go back to France. If we wait until the Russians come into the Eastern European part it would be ages before they are allowed to get back. If you want us to we can take you with us.

Q: Were there other people in the camps besides Jews, other nationalities, other religions?

A: Yes. I have a Catholic girlfriend, Rose, who was at gunpoint questioned on the whereabouts of the presence of money. She was secretary of the most powerful industrial and actually in eight days her hair turned white and as the greatest punishment they threw her into Auschwitz. So there were many others there but not in our camp. We just knew about it.

Q: I see, please go on, what happened then?

A: I now, the day came the French prisoners got news that it is time to advance and that there are very few Germans left . The ones who are left tried to show the white flag and be captured. They carried me on their backs, they carried me on a wheelbarrow, they carried me until they arrived at the American occupied zone. Of course I was very, very scared not having any papers just the tattoo on my arm. The war wasn't practically over yet.

Q: There was still about six weeks?

A: Six weeks. We arrived on a road, as long as I live I will never forget the big dusty road with a moving van standing blocking our entrance scribbled on it was "No Man's Land." And this was where the American officers were in charge of screening people who wanted to go through. These four to six French prisoners stood up on that lawn with hand on their heart swearing that each and everyone personally guaranteed my story whatever I am going to be telling them and they vouched for me.

People whom I had never met, people who have had a common denominator, who had suffered for all those years. We all felt we are one and it was touching experience. I was questioned by the authorities and they wanted to know why I don't want to go to the Russian occupied territory and I said I want to go to America, because my mother's there and my brother's there. And the military government said you cannot go you have no papers. We have very strict orders that only responsible people can go through with ID's but you have non. And I just saw my whole world collapse. I said maybe my brother can vouch for me if you could get in contact with him. What is your brother's name, I told them his name and gave the address of his business in New York. This man came from nowhere in that moving van looked at me and said I know this man, my office is in the same building in New York. I have never met him personally but I have seen his name of the directory many times.

So you asked me before if I believed in God and I say “Yes” because why or how in God’s name this man could have been there. And he said all right I’m going to get in touch with him, here is a pass, go. If you need anything, what do you intend to do and I said well, I will go the highest if I can and I am sure they will track down all the necessary roads for me to get in touch with my family. He advised me to be there next morning at the railroad station, the Red Cross train left, incidentally this road where I met Lima and Lima was the head of the military government over the occupied forces. Because they didn’t know yet how far they are going to go.

I went to the railroad station. There were many other French, Polish, Czech prisoners, Dutch from all over Europe were all assembled and wanted to go home as soon as possible. We were all in that train with opened doors not like before. There were very bad memories about the freight train but this time we were taken care of with food and drink and as we went through Holland, first of all Germany, part of Germany, then Holland. Then Belgium finally right on the border connecting Belgium with France. I had to go through another investigation because I wanted to enter the country and stay there until I get a visa to go to America and they were absolutely marvelous to me.

They had given me, the French authorities had given me tickets to buy food, gave me transportation, tickets for sugar, everything was rationed yet because the war was on. A place to live, clothing, it was really a time which I have forgotten. When I arrived in Paris.

Q: For the first time in seven years you were being treated like a human being?

A: Without any motives, I arrived in Paris and I found the highest who advised me to get in touch with the United.

Q: United Nations you mean?

A: And they got in touch with the United World Congress and I was, I was a Hungarian, I had no papers. I had to first get myself a passport. There was no Hungarian consul because it was still war. I had to get some identification in order to ask for a visa and the [blank space] got in touch with my mother and my brother and they advised them to make arrangements to go to Washington because there were first for brothers, sisters, wives and GI brides. So after a year, a long, long

time, I got my visa and I was allowed to come to the United States. I was the first DP with the GI brides who were flying through. It was March, 1946.

Q: It was a long time to wait?

A: Knowing that your life was not in danger made it bearable.

Q: Do you want to describe what it was like when you arrived in this country? To meet your family?

A: When I arrived in this country, everything I had ever read about it, everything I had heard about it did not live up to that excitement, that overpowering, overwhelming depression that I had. I felt like a little ant. I felt overpowered by the traffic by the buildings like everybody else. But to see my mother who had fasted three days, had asked workers in organizations did you see my daughter? If you have met my daughter let me know. And she never, never, never thought that I am lost. She didn't hear from me after the war broke out at Pearl Harbor in 1942 but somehow she said I'm going to be back.

Q: You sound like two equally---strong women you and your mother?

A: Yes, but you know what is really strong, I would say the power to believe is giving you strength. Because you can be physically very strong but very weak in making decisions, and sticking it out. I think it is the fighting part, believing that is giving you strength. I don't think that people perished because they didn't believe in God, they perished because they didn't believe in themselves.

Q: That's a good point. Had you regained some of your weight by the time you got to this country?

A: Well I gained because my mother, God rest her soul, found a cousin who ran away from Hitler and they didn't really know where she was until they checked her out and she lived in Paris and she collected me from the Higher and I lived with this cousin for one year who actually stuffed me morning, noon, and night was marvelous to me. When I arrived from the 70 pounds, the 75 pounds I was at my liberation, I was 160 pounds when I arrived.

Q: Oh, my word.

A: I was a very, very sick girl. I must mention to you that among other atrocities, the Germans before they sent us out for forced labor, vaccinated us to sterilize every Jewish woman so we should not have a chance to have children in case we should survive this ordeal. Consequently this might have been a blessing in disguise, we had lost our menses, we had no period. For all practical purposes we were sterilized. Also it created a tremendous amount of storing of liquid, or water.

Q: Fluid retention?

A: Fluid retention and that was no weight for me it was all fluid and mother sent to me while I was waiting for my visa application an injection from America with instructions from the doctor who took care of me in Paris which little by little by little restored my health but it took many, many years biologically, scientifically and otherwise.

Q: Was the sterilization permanent?

A: The sterilization was not permanent because I have other friends with whom we were together who have given birth to children. Obviously not everyone, they used one needle so not every vaccination took. Obviously mine did.

Q: When, so you were in Paris at the time the war actually ended. How did people react?

A: It was like one happy family, everybody on the street regardless of color or wherever you were or whatever you came from or what your origin was. Dancing, happiness and embracing everyone hoping that this was the last war.

Q: Were there still Germans left in Paris up till that time?

A: I didn't know because for a while after I was liberated I was in euphoria, I was totally trying to separate myself from whatever happened. Build my little ivory tower around me, I just wanted to be quiet and not let people around me because of the hundreds and thousands that had been around me all the time.

Q: You had no privacy at all during all those years?

A: Well that was not the idea, the idea was really to restore your body if you had anything at all to offer. But coming to this country I have then

met quite a number my accident people who had been in Auschwitz. Like walking on Broadway in New York and suddenly confronting a friend with whom I had spent several months in the same barracks and she thought that I died and I thought that she was gone and these meetings were absolutely incredible.

Q: I wondered that she would have recognized you. You had been 70 or 75 pounds and you said by the time you came here you had put on almost...

A: It's, it's something magical how you recognize one another. It is. I wanted to mention also that while we were in Auschwitz, it was a very strange way of the German hierarchy; they always look for very beautiful women and girls to be chosen at first to be sent out. Nobody ever knew what their destination was but anybody who was chosen didn't feel so good about it because working was a lifesaver but you didn't know what else they had in mind and there were some women without hair which was shaven practically every week not to have lice. They managed to look beautiful, they had inner beauty and beautiful bodies and they were they were the ones that were selected first.

Q: What happened to these women?

A: We didn't know.

Q: You really don't know?

A: Really. It was an eerie feeling so many times many of them would dirty their face, take something, charcoal whatever they found, you know so they would always look dirty or what have you.

Q: Because knowing is better than the other alternative?

A: I also have to mention which is a very interesting part of my life is that one day before I was sent out for forced labor, I was summoned to one of the offices and there was a woman who was there since 1940 taken in Czechoslovakia by the Germans. Consequently there for many, many years and according to the inmates they got higher jobs watching us instead of the Germans. And with whips and sticks or what have you. This woman was standing in the office and said to me I finally found you. I didn't know what she meant. You see when I have my very, very successful boutique in Budapest many, many times a week magazines and newspapers would have articles and pictures of the things I designed and prominent people buying it and these magazines

and newspapers were distributed all over the country and also Czechoslovakia where she saw them. So she could never, never afford going to my place ever but she saw these magazines and she heard from one of the inmates when I checked in, when I arrived that was the only time to had to say her name. Afterwards they forgot you, Alice Dunn has been killed.

Q: Alice Dunn?

A: D U double N. But there were two dots over the U and it was pronounced Denn in German. This girl got me and brought me over and she said now I've found you, now you're going to work for me. I know what you're doing because I was reading all the magazines from all the papers that I was too poor to come [to] Budapest and wear your clothes. And I just didn't believe her and she said now come and follow me and she took me to barracks where they had collections of thousands and thousands of mohair blankets, scarves and all the things which people came with when they thought maybe to keep warm I don't know where I'm going.

All the confiscated garments and she said look around and anything you see that you can work with take that. So I wound up to be the dressmaker in this god-forsaken place for this supervisor who knew my background and I always thing about it when your name follows you everywhere. You can't tell that where you're going to wind up when they don't know you. I was in Auschwitz sewing skirts from these blankets with names using twine to put it together and we had no, she gave me a knife from the kitchen. She had to be very careful also that they should not see what she was doing.

So I became the official dressmaker. Her name was Margaret and she was the one who said to me one morning when I delivered a skirt. I was working in the barracks. Tomorrow there will be a selection, I will be supervising that so try to get in there. Leave the barracks very early the end of the road will be the assembly and then she left. I had the feeling that she expected me in a way for my background for what I did she wanted to give a little gesture. Incidentally she also gave me one piece of bread.

Q: You had to do this sewing in secret?

A: Yes. In the barracks at nighttime. Sure enough next morning about 4 or 5 o'clock it was dark yet and the assembly was at the end of the road and I was in it and that was her final gift to me.

Q: Where did you go?

A: That's when we went to [blank] out to [blank] which was the southern part of Germany and where we go to a factory sharpening aviation parts. That was our forced labor job.

Q: And that's where you had to work five machines?

A: Yes.

Q: You've certainly had some extraordinary experiences and when I sit here and I look at you and I talk with you and you appear so normal and comfortable, I just marvel that you were able to overcome all of these dreadful things and proceed with your life?

A: For a while you don't and you can't really rationalize it. I had a feeling in my special case I was put together with two different personalities, almost schizophrenic. Today when I think back it was another person to whom this happened. When I was very ill I said to myself all the time they can't do this to me, they can't do this to me. It was impossible, it can't be and I know for a fact that it was going to be all over and then some time it didn't look like it would be over and I saw many bodies in the morning when we went out to the latrines lying next to the barbed wire full of electricity. That there is a way out if I can do it. I don't know.

Q: Would you electrocute yourself?

A: I one night walked out and decided that maybe, maybe it's just no use. Time was going by and nothing happened to us, we were not sent out, it was only a matter of days. I walked to that bonfire and that night I thought of electricity. I touched it and I stood there and I felt terrible ashamed. How can I be so weak. And that is until your point don't do it. You can't take your life away. And therefore when I'm answering you again I say is there a God, whatever was [blank], sometimes you say in Jewish your parents are davening, they're looking down, this is your crutch.

Q: You talked about coming to this country and arriving in New York? How it did not measure up to your expectations and how overwhelmed you felt by the numbers of people and how insignificant you felt with these enormous buildings. What would you say were other types of

experiences that you had here that were disappointing or disheartening to you?

- A: I would say that when somebody asks me what was disheartening in your experiences being through all the terror of the Holocaust and its experiences, I say the indifference of people. I realize that being indifferent was a protective shield for them because they felt well all right she is here but it can't happen to us. And the indifference hurt me because I already felt my light years away from them knowing they don't even know that it can and I feel therefore very strong about this. I have something to say and there is a reason why I was chosen among those who are alive to spread the word and to say don't be complacent, people don't change, it could happen to any country at any time and it does.
- Q: Yes, it does and that's partly why we are doing these taped interviews because we want to do our little bit to hopefully prevent this from happening, to make people aware that this can happen any place at any time.
- A: Of course we are, we are touched by it because we are the chosen people and we are going to be another 5,000 years regardless of the atrocities, regardless of what they're trying to do to finish our lives. Somehow we will be dispersed and brought together again and we have a destiny in this world. We can't be destroyed, I'm a perfect example.
- Q: People like you, you're right, you can't be destroyed, you have a remarkable, remarkable spirit.
- A: It's, it's an obligation to be Jewish. Because that puts us over because when they say the Christians were eaten up by the lions and look what happened in Spain and look at the Inquisition and we are still here to tell the story. Of course there might have been many fantastic scientists. They might have killed people who might have changed the entire world but there will be others.
- Q: To get back to slightly more practical things, you are remarried now?
- A: Yes, I am remarried, I met my husband in New York by one of his cousins, they are all Germans in the family. He just came back from the Orient. He was sent out, he was too old to serve in the army during the war and he was sent out as a trial lawyer to Japan and Manilla to represent the Japanese war criminals as defense counsel. Then it was a fantastic experience but when he left he gave up his practice so at

the time that we met, he had just about come back and I arrived it was a very interesting thing because his background, the same background as I had. His parents are Hungarian but came here at the turn of the century but the background is the same and we have been very successful in our marriage.

He's not retired and I was instrumental in moving him out of New York and coming down here because I felt it's a rat race and he worked hard enough, he has a heart condition and I felt if you walk away when it's your choice it's better than when you have to and so we wound up here in Sarasota.

Q: I think you told me you've lived here 14 years?

A: Yes. It was 15 in March. Met a lot of people. The minute I arrived I threw myself into civic duties. I'm very active in [blank] which I very much believe in and education and my Temple

Q: It is, you're still being recorded.

A: And worked for 10 years very diligently as Program Chairman of Organizer and now I've slowed down a bit.

Q: I've asked you a lot of questions, I realize this in a relatively brief time we cannot cover so many things that have happened to you. Are there things I haven't asked you that you want to include?

A: You didn't ask me but I would say that my experience unfortunately has taught me to be very selective and be sure when you talk to somebody. I was sold out by friends in Hungary. I had very bad experiences during Auschwitz. I had wonderful experiences with total strangers who never knew me so I had to have a total shift of values during my experiences and I feel that friendship and trust is a very important thing and that is what really gave my experiences to live on.

Q: Okay. I think we'll stop on that now and I thank you so very much for sharing this with us.

A: You're very welcome.

Q: It's been an emotional dramatic interview?

A: After you leave I will probably remember many things that I should have told you but I'm glad that I put in the idea about me being a

dressmaker in Auschwitz which is really the most remote thing you could possibly think of.

Q: And one more of those contributory things which helped you to survive?

A: To survive? Yes and also the bottom line is you can never get away from what you are. I was very successful and I was a pariah and yet what you know serves you. Knowledge and languages, I pleaded my case when they said I was sabotaging and I went to the hierarchy in the forces labor camp and I was lucky I could speak in German and I thought that the very fact that I can clean my teeth in the barracks with a towel which was always in my mind because they say Jews are cowards. We are not.

Q: Did you learn to speak English in Europe?

A: Yes. It was my parents very very strong will for education first and foremost.

Q: Your vocabulary is extremely good. Much better than most people born in this country?

A: I wish I could have my accent lost. But I went to Dale Carnegie when I was in New York and I said I'm very unhappy about my accent. I can hear it and I don't like it and he said look there are very few things you cannot buy with a dollar, one of them is an accent. Turn it around, let it work for you. What business are you in? Fashions, well forget about it it's an asset. And in that very minute he gave me back my confidence.

Q: Well, your accent is charming and did not interfere.

A: I think it is more important that you have a good vocabulary and that you keep on going.

Q: Well, I thank you again more than I can possibly say.

A: I am delighted that I could be of any help and of course I hope it will be successful.

Q: Well, I think it is.

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