Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a videotaped (audio taped) interview with [“N”], conducted by [“N”] on [DATE] on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in [CITY] and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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Interview with Bozena Ruzickova

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Question: So, Mrs. Růžičková, please introduce yourself to us.

Answer: I am Růžičková Božena and I was born on January 20, 1924.

Q: And where were you born?

A: Sobotka.

Q: In Sobotka. Do you remember anything from your childhood?

A: We didn’t have a very nice childhood, Mrs.

Q: So, one more time, Mrs. Růžičková.

A: Okay, so, my name is Božena Růžičková and I was born on January 20, 1924 in Sobotka.

Q: I see. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

A: There was nine of us, Mrs.

Q: Nine, I see.

A: One died and eight of us remained. One died and seven remained in the concentration camp.

Q: We’ll get to that later. Did you live with your mom and dad?

A: With my mom and dad. We had a trailer and my dad made cauldrons.

Q: I see.

A: And we would travel around the world and my dad would always manage to take care of us somehow. But you know how it was here beforehand, don’t you.

Q: And children?

A: Yah, sometimes he would find work and sometimes not, you know.

Q: But he had a trade of his own.

A: Yes, he had a trade of his own.

Q: Yes. So you never had a permanent home.
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A: No.

Q: No. I see. So, were you able to go to school when you were driving around the country like that?
A: None of us went to school.
Q: I see.

A: You see, dad was busy trying to earn a living. So, for a while we would be in one place and then we would move on.
Q: And when you got older, did you all help your dad a bit more?
A: Yes, we helped. We had to help.

Q: Yes. And what did you do, to help him? Was it with his work or in some other way?
A: Well, when dad would make those cauldrons, we would clean them so that they would be clean.
Q: I see. Yes. … Have you ever experienced unfriendliness from any Czechs before?
A: Yes. There were bad times. … Not all periods were good.
Q: Tell us a little more about it.
A: Well, whenever we would go somewhere they would try to make us go elsewhere.
Q: Somewhere else.
A: So we would have to move somewhere else.
Q: But they would need your dad when he made those cauldrons. Did he work in a factory somewhere?
A: He worked for private customers you know.
Q: In someone’s home as well?
A: In someone’s home and sometimes a butcher. Or whoever would need him.
Q: And you did this all that time until Lety? You worked normally until that time?
A: Yes, then they made us stay put.
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Q: They what, made you stay put?
A: They made us stay put so that we could not drive around anymore.

Q: And when was this? About how old were you?
A: … How old could I have been…

Q: Were you already older?
A: Well, when they put me into the concentration camp, I must have been around 17 years old. Older I wasn’t.

Q: Yes.
A: Uh.

Q: So you don’t remember. That is okay if you cannot remember.
A: Yah.

Q: So you settled down and lived in some house or something?
A: No, we lived in the trailer. I had a fiancé and they put is in Lobeš, which is here near Mělníka, past Boleslava.

Q: Yes.
A: We lived there, but I don’t know exactly how long. And then they took us from there.

Q: And you were there with your fiancé?
A: Yes.

Q: You were there just the two of you?
A: We lived there just the two of us. And I was pregnant at that time when they took us away.

Q: I see. I also wanted to ask you, when there was that many of you children, were you one of the older, younger, or?
A: I was the oldest.

Q: You were the oldest. Then I gather you had to take care of the younger ones.
A: I certainly did. My mom could not do everything herself.

Q: I see. And how was it when they took you away to Lety? How did it take place?

A: Well, how did it go. Like this: they took us away, who was settled, like us, Gypsies, they would take us and put us into trains.

Q: Into trains.

A: Yes. And then we were taken to Lety, an entire train, yes.

Q: And what did they say to you when they came for you?

A: They didn’t say anything at all.

Q: They only said, “Come, let’s go, pack your things?”

A: “Get packed and let’s go."

Q: And who came for you?

A: Czechs.

Q: Gendarmes?

A: Yes, gendarmes. And they took us to Lety and we came there.

Q: That was sometime around 1942?

A: Sometime around 1942, yes. So they put us into cars, from the train, and took us to Lety.

Q: I see. And that train, was that a passenger train?

A: It was a passenger train. But after that, when we were going through Germany, they put us into those swine wagons.

Q: Yes.

A: So we got there and we were just staring. Then they took us and immediately cut our hair off.

Q: In Lety?
A: In Lety, yes. And there was this director there and the second day we were there he made us assemble.

Q: Was he a gendarme? That director? What was he?
A: He was ______.

Q: Was he a gendarme?
A: I don’t know but I know that he was the director, like above other people.

Q: In charge of the entire camp?
A: Yes, above the entire camp. And he told us, “The gate has opened before you, the gate has shut behind you, and there is no return now.” So you can just imagine that we were just staring.

Q: You were scared. And how did it look?
A: The camp?
Q: Yes.
A: It was a large camp. It was this wooden building that went all around.

Q: Do you know how many buildings were there?
A: No, I don’t know.

Q: Well if no then no.
A: I don’t remember this exactly. No.

Q: And how did it look like in those buildings?
A: Well there were beds there one on top of one another.

Q: On top of one another.
A: On top of one another. How many of us could they have forced in there, considering we slept one on top of one another?

Q: Did you have any blanket? Something to cover yourselves with?
A: Yes, we did get some blankets.

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Q: You received them from them?
A: We received it from them.
Q: Were you allowed to take something with you?
A: That which…
Q: That which you were holding in your hands?
A: That which we were holding in our hands.
Q: In your hands.
A: Nothing else. … -- And we went to work in a quarry. And they sent the men to work for farmers. And we went to the quarry, to work in the forest, where we had to work hard. And there were only these Czech gendarmes there, but under the direction of Germans, yes.
Q: Yes.
A: They say now that it was Czechs, but Germans who organized it?
Q: Yes, clearly, it was the Germans who organized it all.
A: Yes, they were the ones who put it all together. And Pesek was in the kitchen, who is now enjoying his retirement.
Q: Was he Czech?
A: He was Czech and he worked in the kitchen. They were all good there.
Q: I see.
A: He just smacked you without thinking. He was a murderer. -- And small children would get a small piece of bread and half a liter of milk. And those who got butter and things like that, they kept it all for themselves or let it just go moldy.
Q: Try to remember what you ate from morning until evening. How did you go to get it or how was it all?
A: Well, we had to stand in a line. He would stand in front of the kitchen, that Pesek guy, who had the kitchen under his authority.

Q: Yes.

A: And whoever would stand wrong he had this sort of stick and he would smack you wherever he felt like. It didn’t matter to him if they were children, grownups or whatever. But if I remember what we had to eat back then…

Q: Were you hungry?

A: Yes, … we were very hungry. Not a little bit of hunger but great hunger. We got so little in the form of food. If it was a half liter, then that was all. Three potatoes, perhaps moldy already. Oh yes, and they would give us this sort of spinach, or perhaps it wasn’t even spinach, because it was all sand, kneaded with just the worst flour. My goodness.

Q: I see. And on Sunday or Saturday, you didn’t get anything better?

A: No, not at all.

Q: Always the same.

A: Yes, always the same.

Q: And all of you would go to work every day?

A: Yes, all of us.

Q: Even the adults?

A: Yes, even the adults would go to work. Although those who were older and perhaps couldn’t anymore they would leave in the building.

Q: I see.

A: And I at that time was pregnant and eventually gave birth to a girl.

Q: So you were already at a later stage in pregnancy?

A: Yes.

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Q: We’ll get back to that later. Did you also have to go to work with your big belly?

A: Certainly.
Q: Yes.

A: To the quarry and the forest.

Q: You had to break stones in the quarry? Or would you just pick things up?

A: We had these sort of hammers and we had to break stones. It was hard work yes it was.

Q: Hard work.

A: And always, “Get to work! No slacking!”

Q: And those gendarmes would supervise you there?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And they would take you there in the morning as well?

A: Yes, yes they did.

Q: I see. And they wouldn’t give you anything over noon there to eat?

A: Well… We would work, I don’t even remember now, until what time we had to work. Then we came back to the camp to go for the _____ food.

Q: I see. And would they also count you during some roll call? Also there in Lety?

A: Yes.

Q: Were there many children there?

A: Yes, there were many. But I don’t remember it so well anymore.

Q: Understandably.

A: But I know there were many children there.

Q: And were you there with your fiancé?
Q: And how was it? How did you live? Were you women on your own or did you live all together with the men?
A: No, no, we all lived separately.
Q: And the children were also separate?
A: The children were in this large building.
Q: Yes, and who would take care of them?
A: The women who were in the concentration camp would be taking care of the children. But you know, they all got such a small amount of food. In the middle there would be this cabbage and the children would run to grab what they could, but as soon as they saw them do this they would run over and start beating them.
Q: How was it when you started to give birth? Did they take you to some ward or something?
A: There was this nurse there and she took it away from me. She was an older woman.
Q: She knew how to give birth?
A: Yes she did.
Q: She was like this wise woman.
A: I see.
Q: She already had some experience with this.
A: Yes, she did this before.
Q: And did you give birth without any complications?
A: It went without a problem. It went well.
Q: Were you able to breast feed?
A: But Mrs., there was so little milk. The amount of food they gave you was small, that half a liter of milk, and that sinewy meat.
Q: And did your child survive?
A: … It did not live very long. I don’t remember exactly how long it survived. It did not survive because children would not survive there very long. Just like that little girl didn’t survive there.

Q: Did she get sick or starve?
A: Well, typhoid fever broke out there. I also caught it. I’ll tell you about that later.

Q: And was it a girl or a boy that you had?
A: A girl.

Q: And what did she get for food. What did you give her when you had so little milk?
A: Well, what could I have given her… What can you give a newborn child. So little to give.

Q: Yes. So, tell us, were you able to rest a bit after that birth?
A: Only while I was in that ward. I don’t know if I was there a week or how long it was. I can’t remember exactly.

Q: And then you went straight back to work?
A: Right back to work.

Q: Did you have your children with you?
A: One old woman took care of my child, some old woman who was in that camp.

Q: Yes.
A: But the children would not last long there.

Q: And how was that ward? Was it in a separate building?
A: Well, there was about two or three beds there. And in the evening, that gendarme would watch over us.

Q: Yes.

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A: In that ward.

Q: And who would they heal there? Was there some doctor there? Would a doctor go there occasionally?
A: None at all. There was no doctor there at all. No doctor existed there.
Q: And when you went to work in the quarry, was there some foreman there? Who would tell you what to do?
A: Yes, there was a foreman there. And two gendarmes would walk with us.
Q: And this foreman, was this someone from the village or chosen from one of you?
A: No. It was some person from the village.
Q: And how did he treat you?
A: Well, … He would tell us what we are supposed to do, according to instructions given to him by the SS. So whatever he told us we had to do. Like that.
Q: I see. And when someone thought that someone is not working properly, were they somehow punished?
A: Well, they had this sort of beating sticks and -- you can see how they broke my joint.
Q: Yes. … And the men were in some other building? Some of them worked for the farmers and went back to the camp to sleep?
A: No, they would sleep at the farmers.
Q: I see. But you said that, besides that quarry, you would also go work somewhere else.
A: In the forest.
Q: And what would you do in the forest?
A: We would cut trees down over there.
Q: Only women would do this job?
A: Only women. We cut down trees and then we would saw them and pile them up into cubic meters.

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Q: … Was that real difficult work as well?
A: You can bet that.
Q: I see. And in the evening, when you came back to the camp and had something to eat, did they count you to make sure all of you were there?
A: Yes. They would always count us. Every time we got back from work.

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Q: I see.

A: They would count us and then we would have to work.

Q: And after when you were done, when you got back from work?

A: Yes.

Q: And would you go immediately lie down then or did you talk a bit afterwards or sing or something?

A: Something like that.

Q: And who else was there from your family? ... Were your parents and the rest of your brothers and sisters also sent there?

A: My parents were not there. Those of them from Hradiště, they went straight to Ausswitz. They hauled us off and left my parents for a while back home. I'll tell you this. I was, I don't remember exactly. Wait a minute. -- The director there had greens growing around the building. It was about a two kilometer walk to the pond and he would organize us into this sort of long line and make us carry buckets of water from the pond so we could pour it over his greens he had growing there.

Q: Yes.

A: But I don't exactly remember how long I was there for.

Q: But you said that your parents were not there. Your brothers and sisters neither?

A: My brothers and sisters neither. They also went.

Q: All of them would go straight to Ausswitz?

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A: Straight to Ausswitz.

Q: I see. Through Brno or, do you remember?

A: I don't know.

Q: Were able to for example write to anyone from there, or to receive some reports? Or were you able to meet with someone? Would someone be able to go visit you there?

A: No one was able to go visit there, Mrs., because everything was watched over.
Q: I see.

A: Yes. And I don’t know how long I was there but I managed to run away.

Q: Well, you will have to describe this to us.

A: I’ll tell you all right. I was at the gate and was thinking to myself.

Q: You were coming back from work? How else could you have gotten to the gate?

A: Well, we came from the forest and I said to myself, “It just doesn’t matter anymore.” I really didn’t care anymore, whether they kill me or not. I really did not care anymore. So I went to the gate and they asked me where I was going. And we had these ovens in the buildings with which we would heat the place. So I said to him that I was going to the forest to get some firewood. And he said, “Go.” So I went and was collecting wood in my arms you see. And I kept looking behind me, if someone was watching over me, but no one was you see. So I got a bit farther from them, from that camp, further deep into the forest. So I threw away the wood and started running. I didn’t know it there, so I just kept running in the same direction how we went in that train. And I was thinking that I was going about the right way back. And while I was thinking of this, I turned around and noticed that they were running after me. So I hid behind a tree and waited to see what would happen. But didn’t see anyone, so I figured I made it. And there was this city there. I don’t know what town it was but heard how a passenger train was making it back to Prague. So I jumped on the train, went into the washroom and locked myself in until I finally made it to Prague.

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Q: And did you have a ticket or how did you go?

A: I didn’t have any ticket because I didn’t have any money with me.

Q: No money.

A: So we got to Prague and I was wondering, what now. So I was listening to the announcements about the trains, where they are going. And this one was just leaving in the direction to my parents.

Q: And where were your parents?
A: My parents lived here past Hradiště. Neveklovice was this sort of village where my parents kept their trailer. So I went into the train and to the washroom again and locked myself in. So I got as far as Hradiště and from there went the rest of the way by foot. And when I got home, they were just staring at me. They couldn’t even recognize me. And my goodness did we cry. But I couldn’t stay there. They packed me up with food as well, got me set up and I had to go into the forest. So I was just walking through the forests.

Q: For how long?

A: Well, at that time, I started getting the typhoid fever and don’t remember so much, how long I was walking about in those forests. They were announcing over the radio that this and that.

Q: That someone escaped.

A: Yes, that someone escaped.

Q: So they were looking for you?

A: Yes, they were looking for me, so I could not show myself to anyone.

Q: And did you know this, or did you just think it, that they will be looking for you?

A: So then I would go back and visit home, you know. From farther off and my mom said that my fiancé and another friend of his also ran away, that they ran away from those farmers. So I don’t remember how long it was before we hooked up. But hook up we did and immediately escaped to the forest. But now we were hungry and needed to eat. So what they would do is, in the evening, they would go somewhere and grab a chicken. And why should I say no to that?

Q: And was it only the two of you or was someone there with you as well?

A: No, there was three of us there. He ran away with that friend of his. But I felt I was almost dead and that I just couldn’t anymore. So when I was in that forest and if someone were to kill me there, I wouldn’t have known anything about it. That is why I don’t remember how long I was there for.
Q: That does not matter how long you were there. But what did you do afterwards when you got sick, when you couldn’t walk anymore?
A: Well, my mom hid me somewhere. She said to my brother, “Nothing can be done about it and you must go with her to the doctor.” So he went to the doctor with me and the doctor looked at me and said, “Immediately to the hospital.” And, at that time, I was totally, how would I say it, that there were times I did not even know who I was. But I remember that there was a tree in the hospital, so it must have been around Christmas some time.
Q: About Christmas of 1942 I gather.
A: Yes. But I don’t know how long I was there either, but I knew later that I am going by car, you see, but I fell unconscious again, or I don’t know what it was, but they took me to Železný Brod, to another hospital. There, I managed to come to grips in about a week, in one week. But I didn’t have any strength. I had a bell over my bed but I didn’t even have enough energy to press it. But there was this doctor, this good doctor there, although I don’t know how long I was there either. I tell you, I would sit a little and everything would spin. And one woman would say, “Růžičková, you have a visitor here below the window.” So
A: Yes.

Q: I see.

A: Yes. So the SS then knew that I was there. So I kept asking the doctor to let me go. But he said that he can’t let me go, that I would give my sickness to other people. But the nurse then said, "I got her out of the worst of it and I am not interested in handing her over to the Gestapo." But that did not matter because he had to give me away. But I don’t know how long that took. They took me to Jičín to the Gestapo, … where I stayed for about three months or something.

Q: In a village somewhere or where?

A: In a village. And then they hauled me off to Pankrac. … There we were in court within 14 days in Pankrac.

Q: Who else? Your parents?

A: No. Me, my fiancé and his friend.

Q: Yes.

A: And we were tried in Pečkárna. It was the biggest there. So now … we all stood up, listen to the judgment and the judge all sentences us to death. So the supervisors would say to us,

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“Well, she’s pretty young. Isn’t it a bit of a shame?” And there were all these swastikas everywhere. So they sentenced me to six years in the penitentiary bin, after which I was to be put back into the concentration camp.

Q: And did you appeal against this decision or did you have some…?

A: No, nothing of the sort.

Q: Did they assign anyone to you?

A: No, nothing of the sort.

Q: Nothing like that. They just came up with the verdict on their own.

A: Yes, on their own.

Q: So six years in the penitentiary.
A: Yes, six years in a house of correction and after that handed back to the concentration camp. And my fiancé with his friend were executed in Prague.

Q: They were. I see. ... So did they cart you off right away after the trial?

A: In about 14 days, after which they loaded us up again in the swine wagons. ... And then we were on our way, yah.

Q: And you went directly to the tracks or were you kept somewhere for a while before that?

A: Well, they would take us on to that right afterwards.

Q: And from the penitentiary, from the village, from that...?

A: No.

Q: From the Pečkárny, or were you from Na Karlaku or from where?

A: On Pankrác.

Q: On Pankrác.

A: And from Pankrac after the trial, in about 14 days, they took us to the swine wagons. There was many of us there at that time.

Q: And were they only Gypsies or other prisoners as well.

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A: There were others there as well, others as well.

Q: But most of them were Gypsies?

A: Well, there were so many of them. But there were some Czechs there as well. And we were traveling, it must have been about three weeks. Perhaps they had bombarded it, so we had to wait a while until they fixed it up again. ... So then they took us to, to Brenen, which was also bombarded. ... Then to some other town, don’t know what it was called, and then they eventually took us to Javor.

Q: Was that in Germany?

A: Yes, that was in Germany.

Q: Javor?
A: They called it Javor Obr Šlejzie, Javor Obr Šlejzie (Jawor could be a town in Niederschlesien. It belonged to Germany until the end of Second World War).

Q: I see.

A: And I don’t know exactly anymore how long I was there. I can’t tell you exactly.

Q: And was that some other camp, or some prison, or what was it?

A: It was a prison; a very large prison. There were French there, Polish, all sorts of nations. There the prisoners worked for the soldiers, making them gloves, sweaters and other such things.

Q: Did you do such things?

A: I also did that.

Q: What did you do; sow gloves or what?

A: I sowed and sowed and sowed. Another person would work on those machines, but I was sowing.

Q: By hand?

A: We sowed many things by hand.

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Q: It was like each person would make a section or something?

A: Yes, for example. … We would get two gloves and we would have to put it together, you see.

Q: You would get two cut pieces to sow together?

A: Yes, yes. … But I can’t tell you how long I was there. -- Then a vicar would come visit us.

Q: Let’s wait a moment here, even though you are not sure. What kind of regime did they have there? Was it worse than in Lety?

A: I would say it was worse in Lety.

Q: Worse.

A: Yes, worse. Here at least we got half a liter of some sauce, but also those two or three potatoes and about this thick a piece of bread and a melt or whatever it was.
Q: And how many of you approximately were in that camp?
A: Many, many of us, Mrs.
Q: And were you a mixed group of nations there as well?
A: Yes. There were French people there, Polish.
Q: But you were working only with the women?
A: Yes, only with the women. There were no men there, only women.
Q: And how did you get along? How did you get along with each other?
A: I'd say I didn't even take notice of anyone there.
Q: I see.
A: I was just making sure that I would do my own work.
Q: Did you at least have some female friend there or someone with which you would be able to share your problems?
A: No, my lady, you know.

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Q: And there they would give you some prisoner clothes or did you stay there in the clothes you came in?
A: No, prisoner clothes. They gave us clogs and these prisoner, striped dresses. -- And then the vicar would come and preach to us that we are passing through the gates of death. That whoever holds out here will have it well and who won't be able to won’t. So, before three o’clock, we would run to move ahead of the advancing front and they ran with us.
Q: And that was?
A: Sometimes a front would be advancing and they would always pack us up. There were many of us. And there was a lot of snow and each of us was allowed to take two blankets, although none of us managed to carry them. I had to throw one away and I was glad that I was able to carry only one. We must have been going from morning until evening. And
German women went with us and these Russian who joined the Germans. Two Russians and...

Q: Were they Vlasovs? The Vlasov army?
A: Yes, yes. Two Russians and one male. And when that guy got mad he just turned into an animal. What should I tell you. We went, it was about three o’clock, and kept going until evening. There was this broken down brick-kiln there into which they put us all. But there was so many of us so they looked for perhaps a shed or something and we must have been going for about a month or something.

Q: And did you have something to eat?
A: Yes, madame. They were pulling some cart and they would boil us let’s say some pea soup and a piece of bread. The others were pulling a cart yes. And that guy, that Vlasov, one woman couldn’t make it any more, so they shot her and dragged her into a ________ and on they went. I was totally wiped out and couldn’t go anymore. So I decided to sit in the snow and told myself, “Just let them shoot me and get it over with.” And that Vlasov came and I told him I simply couldn’t make it anymore.” So he took me like this by the neck and threw me onto that cart.

Q: I see.
Q: So, Mrs. Růžičková, we ended how you were totally wiped out. And was that some German who threw you onto the cart?
A: It was some Russian.

Q: And this Russian, was he a Vlasov, yes?
A: Yes. … And we… And always, in the evening, we would walk several times all throughout the day, and he would always find somewhere, some place where he could keep us for the night. We must have been walking an entire month, that march of death, for a month. And then they would throw us into those swine wagons and take us to Bremen, yes. There we
were about three weeks. They were bombing there as well and German soldiers would hide with us as well, as they were bombing. So then they would take us where they took us. To this place.

Q: And in Bremen, did they take you out or did you have to keep going on?
A: There we were about three weeks.

Q: And was this a camp or also some prison?
A: No, that was a prison. From Bremen then they would take us to ... That was some small camp, but I don't know how it was called.

Q: I see. Was it nearby somewhere? Did you go for a long time?
A: I don't remember that anymore either. So then they took us in those swine wagons, you know, to Hamburg. There we were about a week and there they were bombing as well. Then they took us from Hamburg to Libek, yes. There we stayed in a church for about fourteen days and then they put us in this prison there.

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Q: In Libek.
A: Yes, in Libek. And I can't tell you how long I was there as well. But we would go out and the women would be saying that they heard the front. So they let us stay out there for about half an hour and then shut us back inside. And I tell you there was plenty of joy in about one hour. The doors opened and in came the soldiers and we were jumping all over them with joy.

Q: What soldiers were these?
A: One was a Frenchman and the other a Brit. The American army was the one to free us. Those were times I tell you. You should have heard how they were all singing back home. There were many of us there again. So they would take us in ambulances to the camp where they immediately gave us clean sheets, clean blankets and so on. And they brought in pigs and other meat for the kitchen and there were people there who ate there and who paid with
death. It took me four efforts to eat just one portion because the stomach was so wrapped
tight, you know.

Q: So you quickly came back to where you came from but let us return a bit. From that
moment when that Russian threw you onto the wagon.

A: Yes.

Q: So you stayed on that crate right up to the station where they then put you all for
transport?

A: No, no.

Q: Did you have to walk some of the way still?

A: We still had to go on foot and I don’t remember that part so much anymore. They would
always put us into some shed or something.

Q: You would always stay somewhere overnight?

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A: Yes, wherever they would find a place. But early in the morning we would have to set out
again.

Q: During your travels, did you happen to run into any German citizens in any of those towns
you went through?

A: Certainly, madam, because we would be walking through those villages.

Q: And would they give you a little water sometimes or something?

A: No. But we would meet Germans, soldiers, as they were running. And they were telling the
German women that the war would be over within three weeks. And I learned of this from
those German women, you see.

Q: So you started to gain hope.

A: So, hope there was. I started to tell myself that there is some hope now.

Q: And what state were you in at that time?
A: Well, what can I tell you. I was skinny. No food, so how well could I have been? It was absolutely terrible.

Q: And the accompaniment, did they walk with you or would they ride in the crate?
A: They would go on foot as we did.

Q: I see. And now you came to that village in Bremen. When you were there, was it still the same people that were there who came in the train? Was it still all the same people together?
A: Yes, the same people. And there is still something I would like to tell you. Something I just remembered now. There, in Bremen, yes, I had these fingers that I was not able to separate from one another. And it did this with my mouth. It must have been due to stress. I was with one other person and we were watching how they were bombing. There was this plain there where you could see how the planes were flying, like shot down airplanes, yes. And we were sitting in this window and the gate keeper could have been from anywhere from the German big wigs. We were let's say here and that gate could have been there, … for about 30 minutes. And the plane was circling around and we were watching the plane how it was spitting out bombs. And when one landed where those Germans were, the pressure threw us down from the window and the doors were totally torn apart. It must have been from the fall, how I got scared, yes, how I got scared, then from that fall.

Q: It got fixed?
A: Yes, that is what I want to tell you.

Q: But you said that you were with one other woman in the cell but that you were only two at a time in a cell, or was the cell full?
A: I was with this one.

Q: Only the two of you.
A: Yes, only the two of us. And those were over there.

Q: Then that must have been a very large prison if they were able to put so many of you in there.
A: Very large indeed. They were making munitions for the army under the ground there, in Bremen.

Q: But you did not work there at that time.

A: No.

Q: … Yes. And those guards in the prison, they were all Germans?

A: All were Germans.

Q: They were all German prison guards. Since the war was coming to a conclusion, did any of them perhaps treat you a little better, as if only to create for themselves some alibi?

A: No, madam, that certainly did not happen to me.

Q: No. And were you all still there together? Was it a mixed transport?

A: Yes.

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Q: So, let us leave it for today.

A: Thank goodness for that.

Q: No, we haven’t finished yet. We still have a long way to go.

A: Oh my goodness.

Q: You said that you were later freed in that Libek.

A: Yes.

Q: Please explain this a bit to us. Who was it? In the beginning, only two soldiers came?

A: Yes, two soldiers. And then they came for us in about an hour, taking us away in ambulances. And I was looking at our Czech soldiers. I was totally out of my senses. Where did they come from? After which it occurred to me that it must be the freedom army.

Q: Or perhaps the English army, right?

A: But.

Q: It was, wasn’t it?

A: But they spoke perfectly Czech. So then they took us to that camp, right.

Q: To one which was repatriated, right?
A: Yes, yes. And we were there for about 14 days and then the Swedish Red Cross took us over.
Q: I see.
A: So we were there in one building and got all these packages. Five kilo ones which the soldiers would get.
Q: And did they bring you back to health a little?
A: Yes.
Q: So you were doing much better there.
A: Yes, there was a doctor there who would examine us, yes.
Q: It was the end of the war now, remember?

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A: Yes, it was by now.
Q: For you yes, but do you happen to remember if it was in April or May?
A: In May.
Q: In May.
A: I think it was the seventh of May, I believe.
Q: I will tell you of one camp in case you will remember. Did you happen to be in Bergenbelzen?
A: Madame, we walked a lot but you know I can't read or write, so I don't know.
Q: Only because you said you were all wandering around Hamburg.
A: Yah, yah.
Q: So I thought if by chance, but it's okay. So the Red Cross then took you under its care.
A: Yes.
Q: And how did that go?
A: Well, how did that go. Well, they took care of us, there was a kitchen, they cooked there, yes. We were then in these barracks there. And in about a month, in about a month, they took us back to Prague.
Q: I see. How? By car or by train?
A: By car, by car.
Q: By a transport truck or by bus?
A: No, by transport trains.
Q: Were they trains or vehicles? Transport vehicles or trains?
A: Cars, cars. And then we got into Prague where they put us into those repatients. There each of us got 500 crowns and the repatient identification. So I went to take a peek home, if anyone else had returned. But people told me that no-one had returned.
Q: So you are the only one out of your entire family who survived it?

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A: The only one. Out of the entire family, I was the only one who returned.

Q: And how did you take this?
A: I took it okay. You know how I was, right? So I came, to where my parents were supposed to be but where they told me no-one had returned. So I found myself a husband, yes, who also survived a concentration camp.

Q: Soon after you returned?
A: Yes. After the war, yes.

Q: After the war. Immediately afterwards, once you came back?
A: Yes. I found myself a husband, and then I had that son, who is now in Liberec with him.

Q: And did you know him from before?
A: Well, yes, I did know him a little.

Q: Yes.
A: One woman remained in a concentration camp with his children. So we knew each other a bit already. So we said, why not. So I had that son with him, who is now in Liberec. And, I don’t know what year it was, but he had some stroke and died. Last night actually I was there.

Q: And was your son still young at that time?
A: No, he was no longer young. How old could he have been, 19 I think.

Q: And how did you earn yourself a living after that? Did your son help you at all?
A: Well, my husband went to work, yes.

Q: And when your husband died?
A: Well then I went to work and my son also went to work.

Q: And where did you go to work?
A: I worked at Plastimat where I would clean. I worked hard there madam. What should I tell you. When I wanted to make sure I would have a bit of a retirement pay, I worked one and a half times. I worked there for 25 years.

Q: And how did you get to Liberec, with your husband?
A: Well, with my husband.

Q: Yes. Did he live there? Was he from Liberec? Or did you just decide that…
A: Yes, we decided we wanted to go to Pohraničí, yes. Because of the houses. So then we came to Liberec.

Q: And what did your husband do?
A: He was a laborer. He did not have an education either.

Q: So he worked here in Liberec as well.
A: Yes, he worked. He worked in a textile factory in the city, he did. Our son worked at the tramway company.

Q: And was everything better by then?
A: It was all better by then, thank God.

Q: Have you ever run into some unfriendliness from people?
A: No.

Q: Never?
A: No.
Q: I wanted to ask you for one more thing. At one point, you said how you were walking that march of death.

A: Yes.

Q: That you were already so lost of hope.

A: Yes.

Q: That you didn’t want to live any longer.

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A: That I sat down so they could just shoot me in the head. I just didn’t care anymore. After all this, you really don’t care anymore.

Q: Well, there was a lot of you there. I am sure you must have helped each other in some way.

A: But, madam, none of them was able. They just walked like zombies. And I mentioned to you about an older one who could not go any further, how they shot her and threw her into the pit and we all had to move on.

Q: And those Vlasovs, how they were guarding you, how did they treat you? Did they treat you nicely?

A: Well, that one guy, he treated me nicely, really nice. About four German women were with us, two Russians and him, that guy. The fact that he took me like that and threw me on the cart. So I was twice only a shave away from dying. That was one of them.

Q: And as you would walk through those various villages, you wouldn’t go to work?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: Because they got us to go to one place, perhaps we would stay there for a week and then they would move us on to somewhere else.

Q: Yes. I guess they were pushing you forward ahead of the front. I guess they needed to hide you away somewhere.
A: Yes, exactly like that.

Q: … Another question is if there is anything else we can talk about those years. We went through it a bit. Can you remember of any particular incident which would be worth repeating? You were talking about those children how they were taking the cabbage.

A: Yes.

Q: So they would punish them as well when they would catch them?

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A: Yes, well they would run after them and beat them with sticks, those gendarmes who were there, yes.

Q: The children as well. And those older ones, did they have to go to work as well?

A: Well, … The Vejresks, who were about 12 or 13 years old, they had to work, that’s right. They also went around the farmers, collecting potatoes and worked in the field. They did work.

Q: Did you have the opportunity to meet one another after work, if some people had a family there?

A: Yes.

Q: Children and parents and so forth?

A: Yes they did. But when you came from work, you were glad just to be able to lie down because you were so tired from it.

Q: Did you find out after the war what happened with your parents?

A: No.

Q: No. No one knew.

A: They didn’t know. You know, when they were taken to Ausschwitz, they’d be put to the gas chambers they would.

Q: That’s if they went to Ausschwitz.

A: That mixture of Jews and Gypsies and sorts.

Q: And before that, before they…
A: It will be.

Q: Before they took you away.
A: Yes.

Q: At first, like when they took you to Lety, did you think that something like this might happen?

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A: No, we didn’t count on this.

Q: Not at all. It must have been like lightning coming out of the sky.
A: Yes, it was like lightning coming out of the sky. We didn’t expect that to happen at all. If we knew that something like this could have happened, then we would have…

Q: Took off somewhere.
A: Yes, took off somewhere.

Q: But you behaved bravely in the end, which might have ended up saving your life, otherwise you might have ended up in Ausswitz.
A: Yes, exactly like this madam.

Q: I thank you very much for speaking with us.
A: No problem.

Q: Perhaps someone will still come to speak to you.

ANOTHER INTERVIEWER

X: I wanted to ask you about that camp in Lety.
A: Yes?

X: You were talking about that commander in the camp. Do you happen to remember how he was named?
A: I only remember that one who was in the kitchen, that guy named Pesek. But the commander’s name I do not remember.

X: Okay, so you don’t remember his name. But can you remember if there was some commander there, what he did and how he treated the prisoners?
A: Well, badly. All those who were there were treating the prisoners poorly, very poorly. The food there was very bad as well.

X: Can you perhaps remember of some concrete incident how for example the commander was hurting any of the prisoners or something he might have done wrong?

A: Well, you know, it is already so long ago and a person does not remember everything. But I’m telling you that all of them were bad there. As soon as you would do something, they would start thrashing you all over.

X: And why for example might they do something like this? What reason?

A: Well, why. One could say that they would do it for anything. For example, when we might go to the quarry, or to that work in the forest. If you ever wanted to rest a little, they would come, thrash you and say, “Get to work!” Something like that.

X: And what would they hit you with?

A: Well, they had these sticks.

X: And you said that he hurt you once. How did that happen?

A: Yes.

X: Show us your arm again. How did that happen to you?

A: Well he hit me across the arm with his stick.

X: And for what reason?

A: Well, we were cutting wood and I had my arm like this and with this one I was cutting. And he hit me across this one.

X: For no reason at all?

A: Well, he was just saying, “Get working, get working!” So he hit me until this cut open.

X: And when you had that wound, what did you do after that?

A: Well nothing, what could I have done? You couldn’t do anything there.

X: Did they at least look at it a bit after that?

A: Definitely not. There wasn’t even a doctor there.
X: So how would you heal it, yourself?

A: Well I didn’t heal it any sort of way. All I felt was that it hurt, that’s all. After a while it wouldn’t hurt anymore, but otherwise I did not heal it.

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X: And you kept going to work. And can you perhaps remember about the other prisoners who were there? How perhaps some of them might have been punished or some cases of punishment you might have seen?

A: Well, they would punish everyone there - those prisoners who would work in the quarry and those who worked in the forest. It was no exception to punish people there, any of them.

X: Did it ever happen that they beat someone to death?

A: Well, I remember, no I remember, how they hung this old man up on a stake for about two hours and then they took him down and took him away.

X: Do you know where to?

A: No.

X: Was he still living when they took him away?

A: Well, he was about two hours up there on the stake.

X: And what did they hang him there for?

A: I don’t know.

X: Do you remember Mrs. Růžičková where that stake or post was standing?

A: Well, over here was the kitchen and the post was over here, in these positions.

X: And something else.

A: What I am telling you is the absolute truth.

X: I believe you.

A: It’s the absolute truth.

X: Was it possible that they may have hung others in this fashion?

A: But. … You know, a person just doesn’t have the memory they used to. Terrible things happened in there. And those who were guarding us, those gendarmes, those bastards, I
hope they get a haemorrhage. They gave it to us all right. For example, what did this Sladek
guy have against us? If that guy had the power, he would have been another Hitler.

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X: And Mrs. Růžičková, did it sometimes happen that those gendarmes would somehow
hassle the females?
A: Well, I don't remember anything like that happening.

X: And how about the supervisors in the prison, those so called kapas? Do you remember
any of them?
A: Well, three came from Germany and there were Gypsies.

X: What were their names?
A: I don't know.

X: That does not matter. So, go ahead.
A: They would also go to the forest with us and make sure we were in line, because those
SSes would just sit there and watch us and those Gypsies would make sure we were on our
toes. But their names is something I do not know.

X: And were they also Gypsies?
A: They were also Gypsies.

X: And?
A: But they came from Germany.

X: And did they try to help you in some way, seeing they were Gypsies?
A: No.

X: Were they evil to you all?
A: Well, I wouldn't say they were kind, that’s for sure. But I can’t remember things so well
anymore.

X: And how did they live there? Did they live separately from you?
A: Well, they had their own special room where they slept. We slept elsewhere.
X: And did they have any other privileges? Besides the living arrangements? Were they better off in any other way?

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A: I don’t remember that anymore. I don’t know.

X: And how about the food they ate?

A: Bad food. The food there was bad. You would get three potatoes, which were still moldy, and you would get what they would call spinach. But it was rather a bunch of sand mixed in with that flour and you would only get a little bit of it at that. A little piece of bread, about this thick, and that was all.

X: Did any one get larger portions, perhaps those who had a better position?

A: I don’t remember that any more. The kids got this thin piece of bread, a half liter of milk, and that was all.

X: You said that they did not hand out all the food, that some of it remained. How did you find that out?

A: From the person who told me. … Someone had told me. I don’t know who it was anymore. That apparently they had this storage place there made in the cellar and that they had butter and everything in there. But they wouldn’t give it to the children but rather kept it in the cellar.

X: You found this out only after the war?

A: I found that out after the war, yes.

X: … Later you said that you gave birth to a little girl there.

A: Yes madam, I said that before.

X: Yes. And when she died, did they bury her there?

A: Well, they would make this pit there yes. If more people would die, then they would make a pit there, threw in some lime and threw the bodies in there.

X: And you were there to see this?

A: Yes, I was watching.

X: You were allowed to be there for that?
A: You know, I was there, you know how I was.

X: … I would also be interested to know if you could remember the camp. How it looked, for example what kind of fence it had. Or how it was set up so that none of the prisoners could escape.

A: There was this prickly sort of wire wrapped all over.

X: How high was the fence?

A: How high was it? I’d say about half a meter from the buildings. I don’t know exactly though.

X: Well, were the fences taller than you let’s say?

A: Certainly. You can bet that.

X: And at night, would someone monitor you to make sure none of you would escape?

A: Yes, certainly.

X: And about how many would be monitoring you?

A: There were many there, but how many I don’t know. There were many though, I know that.

X: And were there for example dogs there too?

A: I don’t remember if there were any dogs there. But those dogs were good ones and they could guard on their own.

X: And at night, when it was dark, was there any light on there like outside in the camp?

A: In the center.

X: In the center. Was it well lit, so that anyone would be able to see if they were walking there?

A: Yes, you can say that. It was rather well lit.

X: And did you sometimes try to get out at night from that building?

A: (laughter)
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X: Why not?
A: Because I was afraid.
X: And would you know of anyone who might have tried to?
A: I don’t know. We were all just glad just to be able to lie down.
X: And how would you wash yourselves there?
A: Well how. They would force us all into the pool, which was about a kilometer and a half away. They would force us all, women and children, to that pond and there we would wash.
X: And males as well?
A: No, only the children and women.
X: And how often would you go to this pond?
A: Well... every 14 days.
X: Every 14 days?
A: Yes, every 14 days.
X: And did you have the opportunity to clean yourselves at least a little bit in between that?
A: Well, you could take a bit of water and smear yourself a bit.
X: And water was freely available for this purpose?
A: Yes.
X: And from what would you get the water? Was there a well there or something?
A: There was this duct there that they put together.
X: And was there some trough there with that duct?
A: There was this trough there yes.
X: And you were allowed to go there whenever you wanted?
A: Yes.
X: And what if someone wanted to go to the washroom? Could they go there any time they wanted to?
A: ... I can’t remember that anymore (laughter).
X: And if you can remember anything, what would you say was the worst of all those years? Or maybe some story or something?
A: Well, I’d say the worst was the food there, and the beating, and that we had to work like horses and didn’t get any proper food for it. And they would still scream at you, “Get working, get working!” And if you couldn’t work anymore, then they would beat you. So you had to force yourself to work somehow.
X: … And if we move forward a bit, how you escaped and how they caught you and how you were in that Pečkárna, could you tell us how that went?
A: In Pečkárna? … Well, we would be in court from nine in the morning to six at night. I don’t remember exactly though. … Swastikas all over the place. It was this big hall and then the official would recommend we all get shot. But the supervisors would say I was so young and all. But, in the end, they would sentence only my fiancé and his friend to death and gave me six years in the penitentiary and then back to the concentration camp after that.
X: But I was thinking still before the court, when you were in that cell. Did you share your cell with anyone?
A: Yes.
X: And who were you there with?
A: There were some Czech women there.
X: How many of you were there?
A: Well, there was about five of us in that little cell.
X: And what were the other women there for? Did you talk to them at all?
A: There was one factory worker there. … But I don’t know what they were there for. You know, all you had to do was something small and they would immediately come for you, you know.

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X: And how did they treat you in Pečkárna?
A: Well, as I said, they kept interrogating us, constantly. And then those two got sentenced to
death and I got this.

X: So you were interrogated also before the court.
A: Yah.

X: And how many times about?
A: If only I could remember.

X: And how did the interrogations go? What kind of questions did they ask you?
A: … Well, here in Jičín, there was this Gestapo. They pulled me out of the hospital and took me there, where they told me that I will get years but that the other two will get it that way. But those were Czechs who were at the Gestapo.

X: And in Pečkárna, with the interrogations, was it Czechs who were speaking to you or were they Germans?
A: Germans, but there was this interpreter there who was translating for us.

X: Were they there during the interrogations as well?
A: No.

X: No.
A: No.

X: … And then you said that they took you to some camp at Brema. What kind of camp was it?
A: It was a small camp and then they took us away … Brema.

X: If you could also remember, let us stay here for a bit. How did this camp look?
A: Well, buildings round in a circle, those barbed wires and so on. We were there for about a week or two. Then they took us to that … my God.

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X: You said some kind of Javor or something?
A: I was there. They then took us to that Javor, yes. I don’t know how long I was there though. It was from there that we started that march of death, from that Javor. Dresden.
X: At Dresden?
A: Yes, Dresden.
X: Could it have been directly in Dresden?
A: Right in Dresden, and then they took us to Javor. This took us about two or three weeks in those swine wagons.
X: Where did you live in Dresden?
A: In prison.
X: In prison in the city itself. And what did they do with you all there?
A: The woman supervisor would come and tell us that they’re not covered 14 days and that they can’t do anything to help us.
X: So they left you there in the jail?
A: Yes. And the bombing threw us up like this, the pressure from the bombs. And the Germans were firing at the bombers with their anti-aircraft stuff.
X: And the jail was above or below ground?
A: Above ground.
X: Above ground. And did they give you some food while you were there?
A: Well, like a piece of marmalade and a piece of bread.
X: And what did they tell you as in what they were going to do to you or why they are holding you there?
A: They did not tell us anything. Nothing at all.
X: Were there other Gypsies with you there?

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A: To tell you the truth, I was by myself among them.
X: What other nationalities were there?
A: My goodness, French, Polish, Russian, … So many that you can’t remember, many of them.
X: And where did you go from there?

**Conclusion of interview.**

**End of tape 1.**