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# HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

MALVINA HERZFELD

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Marian Salkin
Date: December 23, 1982

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Gratz College
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MH - Malvina Herzfeld [interviewee]
MS - Marian Salkin [interviewer]
Date: December 23, 1982

*Tape one, side one*:

MS: Mrs. Herzfeld, would you give us some information as to where you were born and a little about your background as a young child growing up in Europe and whatever information you would like to give us about your family?

MH: I was born in 1914 in Zurich, Switzerland, and I lived there for a little more than ten years when my father decided to open a business in the free state of Danzig which today is Gdansk, where I continued with schooling there, and Business College. I lived there until 1936. In 1936 I went for a visit to Holland to my aunt and uncle, and I liked it very much, and I stayed in Holland. During that year I went back and forth yet, from Holland, Amsterdam to Danzig, and in 1937, December, 1937, I got married to a fellow by the name of Martin Sternfeld who was a non-practicing lawyer. He studied law in Germany and he was born in Germany and lived later in Berlin where he no longer could practice, continue to be a lawyer.

MS: What year of college was he in when the Nuremberg Laws came in? Do you have any idea when he had to stop going to school? Was he almost finished at that time?

MH: No, he was thrown out of the university much before that time. That was the first action really, what they did, and he did not go in Berlin to the university; he was in Königsberg, which is now Russia. Then his father lived near there in a small town in Germany and his father and mother and sisters, and they moved to Berlin, and I think it was in 1930. My father-in-law was a cantor; my husband came from an extremely religious family, and in order to try to make some money that time in Berlin, he was tutoring law students. Of course, the law students they were non Jews, because no Jew was a law student any longer, and of course, a Jew to tutor a Christian--that was forbidden. In 1936 he was warned to leave Germany immediately because one of his students had found out that my husband's brother-in-law, who was a prosecutor in Berlin at the courts in Berlin, that he was arrested. So my husband just took off one evening got on the train and went to Amsterdam for a visit with his sister. His sister was married in Amsterdam, and he remained in Amsterdam so it was very difficult, but he had got the permission to stay in Holland. The same happened to me; I did not want to go back anymore to Danzig, and I did not want to go back to Switzerland because my parents were supposed to come and live in Holland.

MS: In Holland or Danzig?

MH: They lived in Danzig but they were supposed to move to Holland.

MS: Tell us a little more about your family, Mrs. Herzfeld.


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MH: My family? My parents were born in Upper Silesia, both of them, not in the same town, but near each other. Upper Silesia was once Germany and then it was Poland and back German again, but my parents came to Switzerland at a very early age and they were married in Switzerland and they met in Switzerland. My grandparents, my mother's parents, lived in Switzerland then, too. They lived in Lugano, which is the Italian part of Switzerland. It's a small town in the Italian part. My mother was a schoolteacher, and she lived then in Zurich and she got married in Zurich. And some of her sisters lived there too. We were three children, my brother, my oldest brother, and I had another brother. I was the youngest and the only daughter, and we lived in Zurich until my father decided in 1924--he wanted to see if he could open another factory in Germany, or rather in Danzig. He had some connection and I don't remember what the connections were with Danzig. It was a free state, and he saw it was very successful the business there.

MS: Tell us the kind of business your Dad was involved with.

MH: A chocolate factory. [laughter] Yes, my father had a chocolate factory, and the factory in Danzig was also very prosperous. And he stayed there for one year and my mother said if he remains that we will not remain in Zurich because as a family we have to stick together. So my mother and the three of us went to Danzig, and we did not really live in Danzig. We lived in a town which is called Zoppat [German]. I don't know what it is called now. It is a big resort, a beautiful resort right on the Baltic Sea, on the bay. The bay was Danzig. We remained there, and I went to school there and in 1935, my father went back to Switzerland, and he decided that we would leave Danzig and maybe go to Switzerland that my mother wanted to go back to, or to Holland because part of her family lived in Holland.

MS: Was this decision based on the political situation of the time?

MH: Yes, on the political situation. It was before even Hitler came into Danzig, but it was already in Germany. Unfortunately, my father on the way to Switzerland had a stroke, but he survived and he stayed a year in Switzerland which we went to see him, and we were all set. He came back to liquidate everything, and of course, then he got in when the Nazis were there. They took our factory; they arrested my oldest brother who was working for my father, and since he wasn't a very well man, but he had recuperated marvelous. He had a heart attack after they arrested my brother, and they took everything away from us, and he died. Then of course, the things were very bad for us because we didn't have the factory, so my...

MS: Just let me ask you at this point, you were back in Danzig, you were leaving Danzig and the family were relocating itself?

MH: No, we stayed. My father went back to Zurich, but we stayed because we were supposed to follow him, but he got sick unfortunately and couldn't do much. And for a year he remained there, but then he came back. And after that, it was not very easy for my mother who was in the business, but still we had no saying anymore, because it was

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taken away. It was sold, so-called sold. It wasn't really sold, it was an *alienizat*-I-on [aryanization] program.

MS: How did the family survive at that point?

MH: We had money, and we could live from it. And my brother got a job at the Jewish, he could not work for another firm. My brother is now an accountant, but at that time he was more than a bookkeeper, he was the secretary of the Jewish, of the synagogue and the whole Jewish community of that town where we lived, and...

MS: Was this the same brother that was arrested?

MH: Yes, the same brother that was arrested.

MS: Then they didn't keep him, they released him.

MH: They released him, and my brother got the job, which was a paying job of course and it was a very good job. He was the secretary combined with all the smaller towns in the free state of Danzig. There were smaller towns around. He did everything there and he organized children's transfers to Israel, France and [not Israel, Palestine], to Palestine, France and England. And in--I went to Holland in 1936, and I got married in 1937, and my mother came with me; she stayed.

MS: May I ask you a question? You mention that your brother was affiliated with the synagogue in Danzig. Was your family, in a sense, an observant Jewish family?

MH: Yes, my father was the president of the synagogue. We didn't have a very strict religious home...

MS: But there was an affiliation, a Jewish affiliation?

MH: Oh, yes, in fact we had a kosher house. I was confirmed in the synagogue, and my brother's bar mitzvah was there, too, both of them. I had another brother who was a chemist and he disappeared. Yes, he was one of the first taken, they picked him up.

MS: Was this in Gdansk?

MH: Yes, he just disappeared, they picked him up and we don't know where. And my brother was left and my mother was in Holland and my brother--it's very complicated--my brother was in Danzig and he organized all those children transports and he had a girlfriend, Jewish girl.

MS: Do you want to give us your brother's name so that we can have it on the tape?

MH: My brother's name is Henry Jennings. He changed his name in England. He had a girlfriend and in August, 1939, he organized a children's transport to England. He took his friend, his girlfriend with him, who was at that time a young girl of sixteen or something like that, and went with him to England, with the idea to possibly stay in England or come to Holland. And he didn’t even have a chance because I saw him in Hook Van Holland when they came through there from Danzig you know, to go on the ship to England. He got into London where we had a very big family, there where he was. And his girlfriend was working in England in a factory, and her mother and her grandparents were still in Danzig. Her father had died. And he married her in 1940, and then enlisted


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right away for the British Army. He volunteered for the British Army because that's when he married this girl and so that she could get his pay. That was the idea, really. We had a very large family in England, very large. My mother comes from a large family and her brother and one of the brothers lived in England and her cousins. They have been in England. All the children were born in England from this branch. So that's where my brother is now.

MS: So therefore he remained in England and was relatively safe throughout the entire war.

MH: But he was for five years in the army, yes in several invasions, Dunkirk, and in the Normandy, and all this, but he survived and he lives now in England and he is a grandfather by now. Both children are married, he has two girls and...

MS: Well, let's continue with the story where your mother came to Amsterdam with you. Was your younger brother with her at that time?

MH: No, he was taken away in 1936. He had a non-Jewish girlfriend and he was caught. That was not allowed: an Aryan with a non-Aryan. Somehow, I think they belonged to a tennis club or something like this.

MS: How old was he at that time?

MH: Let me see. I was born in '14, he was born in 'll. I'm the youngest. He was born in 1911, and my oldest brother was born in 1909.

MS: He must have been in his twenties when that happened.

MH: Yes, that's what happened; he was taken away.

MS: Do you remember how?

MH: I wasn't in Danzig; I was in Holland already.

MS: And so at that point your father had, was still alive then, when your mother came to Amsterdam?

MH: No, my mother came later after I got married. No, he was not alive then. So it was a very tough thing for my mother. She really tried to hold the family together, and as I said, financially, we could manage let's say this way. She also worked yet a little bit. She tried but she couldn't either as a Jew; she also worked, but not really. I don't remember my mother even working, but when she came to Holland, she lived with us.

MS: All right--now tell us a little bit about how you met your husband--and married.

MH: Okay, I had met my husband already in the town that we lived, in Zoppat, in Danzig. I had met him there; when through a girlfriend of mine who was also Jewish, we knew each other, we went to the business college together. And she introduced me to him, to my first husband...

MS: His name was...

MH: Martin Sternfeld. This was in 1935 and then when I heard that he wrote to me quite often from Berlin and then I got suddenly a letter from Holland and that's when I went to Holland. I went to visit to my aunt and my cousins. They lived in Rotterdam not


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in Amsterdam, but that's why I went to Holland with the promise that I will come back, but then the situation got very bad, and I didn't want to go back because I felt much safer in Holland and I had wrote to my mother to definitely to come to Holland. She came, but she went back again. It's very difficult you know, the language and you know--say, if I picture myself now suddenly to go, it's very difficult. When you were young it was a different story, you just went. And so when we got married, she, of course, came to our wedding, and she stayed. She could not stay permanently. Eventually, if everything would have been all right, she would have been able to, but she had her temporary visa. She could always extend it again because my family in Rotterdam, my cousin, my uncle had died, and my cousin in Rotterdam was the chief cantor in Rotterdam in the synagogue and he had quite some influence.

MS: I was going to ask you, how did it work out with your citizenship? I mean, you were from another country.

MH: Yes, I had a dual one. I was born in Switzerland; being born in Switzerland, you're Swiss. Right.

MS: But then when you went to settle in Holland didn't you have to apply?

MH: Yes, I had to apply. But I could keep my Swiss--I didn't have a passport, I had what they call in Switzerland, a *Heimatschein*, that is that you were born in Switzerland, that is besides your birth certificate, and that I could live and come to Switzerland any time I want and be treated like a Swiss.

MS: But did you have an alien status then in Holland?

MH: Yes, more like a Swiss. Because I married a German national [my husband was born in Germany], he had a German passport, I automatically became--had also a German passport, but I also had my Swiss, it was a dual citizenship, which here it is not, here you have one.

MS: Then you could remain in Amsterdam and stay as a citizen.

MH: Yes, I could remain--sure eventually, yes because see through this lawyer who was a very influential man in Amsterdam, it would have been very simple to become a Dutch citizen. It would have been very, very easy.

MS: But that never happened?

MH: That never happened. No, of course not, Hitler came in between, you know. He would have gone to university, to make his exam, his bar, then he could have been a lawyer and then we would have become Dutch citizens. You had to have a sponsor for that; you could not become a citizen without a sponsor.

MS: And that would not have been a problem for you?

MH: No, that would not have been a problem because of this Mr. Defriez who was a very well-known man. Unfortunately, their family didn't come back either because we got another sister, my husband's, out from Berlin, and she lived with these people, she was sort of, not the house maid, but they were very quite well-to-do people, she was in the house with the children because it was the only way she could work in Holland.


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MS: She was, I can't think of the right word for it, a nanny?

MH: Yes, a nanny, something like this but she was taken away with the whole family, the whole family, Defriez. They never came back.

MS: So then tell us about what were the events that led up to the invasion of Holland in 1940, and how it affected you and your husband at that time?

MH: It started, really--we had no idea. We didn't know, we really believed, that Holland who had been neutral for a hundred years by that time, that Holland would be invaded, which is, of course, very narrow-minded, because when you see the geography of Holland border to the German, one border is Germany, and we were invaded May 10, 1940--May 9. My brother went to England with the idea, before of course, he went in August, 1939, and this was May ‘40, but we had a lot of his things in Holland, and we wanted to ship everything to England, and when we got to the post office, they didn't take packages to England, and we were so surprised. And when we came home, we spent the day in town, we lived outside the town in Amsterdam, and we spent the whole afternoon in town and when we came home and everything was fine, and in the middle of the night we hear shooting . So we turned the radio on, and we still didn't hear what was going on. We lived in an apartment house and our neighbors below us knocked on our door in the middle of the night. She said, "Let's go up on the roof." Now, in Holland the roofs of the apartment houses are flat, really, mostly flat, and then you can just walk on there. We lived very close to the airport in Amsterdam, Strepol and we saw it burning. We saw a fire there. And then our neighbor's husband was in the army. He was registered, and had to go to the Army. He was called to be right away. During the night even he left and then we knew, and in the next day we knew again. And we listened again to the radio the next day and we heard that the Queen and her family left for London. Then we knew exactly what it is, why that happened and we went. In Amsterdam, we didn't see the Germans until a few days later, they marched to Amsterdam. Now it was 1940 when the invasion. The first year we had pretty much everything, no ration cards, they didn’t do anything to the Jews. It was not right away. It started really the end of '40 and 1941. After all the stores were empty, we had by then there was very little food left because everything went to Germany. They took out everything, but they left the Jews pretty much alone. And the Jewish Council of Amsterdam came really into existence in 1937 to help the Jews from Germany to come into Holland, temporary. They had to have a possibility to move on, to have a visa for America, for any other country.

MS: In other words, it was like a way-station?

MH: Yes, that’s what it was, but they could remain.

MS: What did they do for them? Did they settle them into homes?

MH: No, they got settled in a camp, Westerbork, that was in the northern part of Holland.

MS: Which later became a concentration camp.

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MH: Right, it was near Groningen, near there. They had quite a bit land, and the Dutch government gave the land to the Jewish Council, and they built little bungalows in that camp. There were like bungalows, row bungalows, and each bungalow had two rooms: a bedroom, a living room, a kitchen, a little dining room and a bath, and that's where the people who came in 1938 after the Crystal Night. Holland opened the doors for one day and night for everybody who could prove who is Jewish or a political prisoner, and they could stay in Holland.

MS: When you say one day and night, you mean they just opened the border?

MH: Opened the border. They could come in. Of course, they checked them out, but they let them in.

MS: And was it like 24 hours and then they closed it up after that?

MH: They closed it up because Holland by that time, the whole of Holland—only 8 million people. They couldn't do much. But, they opened up, and then they put them in first with families, and they had like a big school in Holland which they lived and they were supported by the Jewish community.

MS: Until this camp...?

MH: Yes, that camp was really self-supporting. Like people came, a family got these bungalows or three fellows or three girls, if they weren't married, three or four lived in there or a family with a few children could live in there. And they had built this, and they had made it was a fence in there. They had to stay there, and they had a lot of grounds where they planted vegetables and they were pretty much self-supporting. They had chickens, they had everything, and yet if they needed the money came. They got paid every week. They got money every week from the Jewish community. The community was the Jewish council. They were extremely wealthy, the Jews in Amsterdam, mostly were diamond merchants. And they were extremely— Amsterdam, Rotterdam, all the big cities, it was a very wealthy Jewish community, and they were the ones who supported it and donations from the other Jewish families. Every family could take somebody, one or two people, to their house for a weekend. They got a pass to come out from the camp, but they had to stay in the camp and they had to try to leave Holland. They didn't give them a certain date but they had to try. They had to prove that they had somebody somewhere, was it South America, was it North America, wherever they could go but Europe.

MS: And then the people who worked in the Council would do the paper work and try to make the contacts for the refugees to send them on further?

MH: Yes, right, to get an affidavit or to get a permit to somewhere, to South America. Most of these people, and there were close to 400, went to the United States.

MS: I thought from what I had read that thousands of Jewish families...

MH: Yes, came into Holland, not thousands but quite a bit but they came before the Crystal Night, before '38. They came from '33 on.

MS: Right, how were those people absorbed into the country?


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MH: They were as Germans, Jewish, but they could do anything. Most of them were—let me tell you. Holland was before really a country of agriculture. When I first came to Holland, fashions and things like this weren't so great, and the most of the German Jews who lived in the bigger cities in Germany had clothing manufacturers, designers, and also actors, the theaters and the movies was quite a few were Jewish, and they came to Holland. They brought their culture, and they brought the idea of the fashions, a lot of the clothing manufacturers, and they, when they could prove, some brought money along, illegal but they...

MS: Then those that came in the very early years set up themselves into business and just melted right into the culture?

MH: Yes, they could take money. Right into the culture. In fact, they contributed, not to the culture. To the economy, more than anything else.


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*Tape one, side two*:

MS: We were speaking about the German Jews that came early, in the early years, '33, '35, into Germany [probably meant Holland], and you say you had many friends amongst this group of people?

MH: Yes, we had friends amongst them. Especially through my sister-in-law, who was in Holland since 1932 or '33, in Holland, and she knew quite a few of the people because my brother-in-law was the photographer, the number one photographer, in Amsterdam; he had a big studio. And that's how they knew most of the people, and that's how we got in it too, and through this lawyer, this Mr. Def iez. We had met many other people too, Dutch-born, and people who came from Germany, and who had brought some, a lot of money in, and had, they came quite early, like '33, and had started businesses in Amsterdam. I only speak about Amsterdam because that was the only town I lived in.

MS: Well, and it was the largest...

MH: It was the largest city, yes.

MS: Mrs. Herzfeld, tell us a little bit about what your husband was doing about this time of 1940, in his own life as far as work is concerned, and what happened to you after the Germans came in, and how you became a part of the committee?

MH: My husband worked r this lawyer as a legal aide, or something like this, since he had not made his exam in Holland. And he also worked for the Jewish Council because this lawyer was on the committee, on the Board of the Jewish Council, and that's where my husband also worked, as a legal aide to these people who were, came in, and needed help from Germany, who came without money, who came later, and couldn't bring any money, and needed help. There were also, even if they were not in that camp in Westerbork, some who came, not--they came into Holland, maybe not illegal, but they were not citizens, and they could not work. So they were supported weekly, with weekly checks by the Jewish Council, and my husband, that time, was the legal aide to help them, to help them to get situated and possibly to become Dutch citizens. And that's what he did.

MS: There was a very prominent man who was the head of that Council at the time...

MH: Yes, it was Professor Cohen and Asscher.

MS: Asscher, yes. And there was also a Mr. Visser...[1]

MH: Visser. Right, yes. And a Mrs. Fontaine. She was very, very much, very active there. These were the top people. The top people with a lot of money.

MS: Well, according to a small article that I had read in this book of the destruction of the Dutch Jews, and also in Nora Levin's book, *The Holocaust*, that once the

[1]Professor David Cohen, Ahen Asscher and L.E. Visser. Cohen was Chairman of the Committee for Jewish Refugees. Visser was President of the Supreme Court of Holland and broke with Asscher and Cohen when the *Joodse Raad*, Jewish Council, was created.

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Germans came in, invaded Amsterdam, that the Committee that was headed by Mr. Visser, who was also acting as attorney of quite, or a judge of...

MH: Yes, he was quite...

MS: They immediately, or outwardly, anyway, that they, the organization disintegrated because they wanted, they did not want to deal with the Germans in any regard, in any way whatsoever.

MH: No. But the Germans did business, did integrate with them. Not integrate, but they dictated what they have to do.

MS: To the committee... [2]

MH: To the committee, sure. That was all, all checked by the Germans. They needed the committee, that's how they got the--I wouldn't say, that is not right. You probably will, you probably don't know why did the Jews go and got registered. Why were they registered? Now this is Europe. In Europe you have to move from one street to the next, you have to go to the police, and they make a notice of that, that you moved from one lane to the next street, or from one road to the next road, you have to, and this is in there. This is written in there. The Jewish committee had to provide the names the Jews.

MS: Well, was there a... ?

MH: Besides that, we were all registered with the police.

MS: Well, that was, when you registered with the police, wasn't that an edict that was handed, I mean, the Dutch government, did the Dutch government register the Jews, or did the Germans register the Jews?

MH: The German registered the Jews, but the Dutch government, if you were a non-Jew, no matter what you were...

MS: Oh. you had to be registered.

MH: You had to be register. And that goes, that was the same in Germany, that was the same in France. Most of the European countries.

MS: If you were not a national?

MH: Right. I don't know how it's now, in the present time, but I'm sure it's the same. When you move in Europe, you have to tell the police where you are moving. In this country you can disappear very easily, but that you had in Europe. It's not in England like that, but it is in, on the continent. And that's what happened; the police had all the records. And you tell the religion what you are. And the Dutch were a very liberal country, extremely, because the Queen was certainly for the Jews. In fact, you would never, you could never call a Jew is a Jew. It was not the right word to say. You never talked about a Jew. If they talked about a Jew, somebody is a Jewish faith, they talked about in Dutch like the Israelite. That was by the order of the Queen. Of course, you know there is not a country without antisemitism.

MS: Yes, which brings up the point, while you were, the years that you spent in Amsterdam, were you ever conscious of any antisemitism?

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[2] *Joodse Raad*, or Jewish Council, created in February 1941.

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MH: No, no, none whatsoever. Never. Never. It was an extremely, we knew in fact, the one who went with the German, Musset [phonetic] he was a Dutch-born, he was the biggest antisemite, which came out afterwards. But, never. We lived, you know, and it goes for Europe, I'm not talking about Poland or Russia, we were not like, there was no Jewish neighborhood. Yes, there was the *Judenbreestrasse* [phonetic][3] where Rembrandt lived, and all this, but that goes way back from in the 14th century, when the Jews from Portugal and Spain came to Holland. And, as you realize, the way I was married and the way we belonged to a synagogue, that--only knew the Sephardic way of praying, and it's all Sephardic.

MS: Then, the main Jewish community in Amsterdam was of a Sephardic background?

MS: Only, there was no other. No other. There was no reform congregation. Now they have one. But there was none. It was very, very, very strict. Very orthodox. It was the only, that's how I was married, in an orthodox fashion, with going to the *mikveh* and everything like that. But, see now, you asked me question too, if I felt anything, you know--what I have here and what my mother had in Holland, and all our things were hidden by a non-Christian[4] friend. She went into our apartment and she took out whatever could be taken out. All the silver, all the linens, everything. She had eight girls in her apartment hidden.

MS: That, of course, that's well known that many thousands of Jews were hidden by their neighbors.

MH: Oh, yes. I had the chance too, but I just didn’t want to.

MS: So tell us about that part of your life.

MH: Well, this certain friend, who was a, she had also quite some connections in Holland, her brother was one of the biggest builders in Amsterdam, and she tried to talk me into, to stay with her brother's father-in-law and mother-in-law, to be hidden. I tried that for one day, and it wasn't for me. I couldn't do that. It just wasn't for me. By then, already, I had worked for the Jewish, I also worked for the Jewish Council, but I worked already quite early for them, and my husband was around when the people from the "Saint Louis," from that ship--I was in Rotterdam when they came, and the ones who came into Amsterdam. I was in Amsterdam too with them, when they came from the ship, with coffee, and some of the women, the wives of a lot of the members of the Jewish Council, we were there to give them their--when they came off the "Saint Louis", too...

MS: And they remained in Holland?

MH: They remained in Holland, yes. Not all of them. Holland, Belgium and France and England. Not Belgium, Holland, France and England, I think, took them, yes.

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[3]The correct Dutch designation is St. Antoniesbreetstraat, in the Jewish Quarter, where Rembrandt lived from 1639 to 1660.
[4]Mrs. Herzfeld undoubtedly means "non-Jewish."


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Of course, the ones who stayed in Holland didn't survive, not all of them. Some did, yes, who were on the "Saint Louis". And, well, I felt this was not for me.

MS: Now, was your husband with you during that time?

MH: No. He was picked up in 1941-

MS: Could you tell us a little about how that happened?

MH: In 1941, this was the first time a bomb exploded in a officer's villa, and this villa was...

MS: German officers?

MH: German officers. The villa was occupied by, it was owned, the owners were Jewish, a Jewish family, and they had to leave the big house, and they moved in, the Dutch officers, the German officers, sorry. And one morning, we heard that during the night, a bomb exploded, and the whole house was--no injuries at all. All the officers, nobody was in that house, and the house was destroyed. It was a three-story house, a very big house. And they blamed that the Jews did that. And their first action, they had a list from that club with every name, and they knew everybody who had a profession, and they tried to get all the *intelligentsia* first because they were too dangerous for the Nazis. And they got about also close to 400 young men of the age between 19 and 30. They made--a couple days afterwards. So I found that out from--when we first got married, we lived in a small apartment, and above us lived a family, and she was very much sort of, which is very common in Holland, they believe in reincarnation and all these things and spiritism and stars, and that was her hobby. And she wanted, she had called me a few days before, and she said, "Why doesn't Martin stay in town and come to us, and he will stay here, because I feel there is something going to happen," and, really, this sounds very silly really, three days later it did. And I was called that they are going to do something. Somebody called me that there is something going on. They are going to have action against Jews.

MS: In retaliation...

MH: In retaliation for the bombing. And I called the office where my husband worked, and they told me he left. Of course, you know, he wasn't in the car, and things like this, at that time we didn't have a car, he was somewhere on a bus or trolley car. And then when he got home, I saw him coming and with two SS men, and they said that he is, he has to come down to the headquarters, and I should give him a few things along. And I tried to bribe them. Of course, that was impossible. It was impossible. They said they would take me too. I said, "Take me." So they told me they didn't want me; they took him alone, and I found out that he's somewhere in Holland. And I tried to get there. It was somewhere near the University of Leiden, the big university in Holland. And I never got...

MS: Was that another city that was...?

MH: Yes, it was another city. And I never saw him. And when the Russian got into the war in 1941, and I think that was in June 1941, they liquidated that camp in Holland. I don't know what kind of a camp, or if it was just a, it had about 400 young men there, and they sent them to Mauthausen, to the concentration camp. And as I said, I got


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letters from Mauthausen, from my husband, three letters, which were, of course, censored, and he said that he's doing very well, and, but he thinks very often what this lady had told him, that he should come, and things like that. And that he has enough to eat, and he is reading a lot, because this was all censored, it was nothing. And then I got this certificate, September 1941.

MS: Which was, in effect, a death certificate?

MH: A death certificate. That is a death certificate. It says "*Sterbeurkunde*", which means death certificate. And so did the others. And this was given to the Chief Rabbi of Amsterdam. He was still around then. He never came back either. And we compared, you know, like with the parents of the young men, or the wives, we compared what we heard; we compared every letter. They got letters, and then everybody compared this death certificate, and it was identical the same, only was different names. And that was it. And after that, in 19, towards the end of 1941, that's when they started with the big actions against the Jews. And...

MS: Did you give us, did you, I don't remember, did we put on the date, the month or so, when your husband was taken into custody, about what time of year was that, do you remember?

MH: It was in 1941, it was in June, no, it was before that, yes end of May or early June.

MS: So that was almost a year after the...

MH: No, no, I'm sorry. May ‘40, we were, no, no, it was in ‘41. They only stayed there maybe in April ‘41, something like this. They invaded May ‘40, nothing happened, until ‘41.

MS: Almost a year then?

MH: Right, almost a year afterwards. Right. Because he was sent in June ‘41, they left Holland. So he was only a few months there. Could have been April or May.

MS: And what were you doing during this time? Were you involved with the committee, with the underground at that time?

MH: No, at that time, not yet. But in--I was still at the Jewish committee, because I worked there. I had my card. And with that card, the Germans didn't pick you up right away. Eventually, they got everybody, no matter what. But at least for the time being, and I was approached by one man who also worked for the Jewish Council, and he asked me and he approached me for one reason, because he knew that I, my husband was taken away, and he said if I would like to work with him. And I first, I didn't think exactly what he meant. And then he said, "It would be very--they have a Dutch underground, and it's not, and they have sort--they have everywhere in every city, and everywhere they have people working, Jewish people, working underground. And if I would do that." And, of course, you know, I had no longer was in my apartment because then, right after that, a Jew could not have an apartment.

MS: So then the restrictions started?


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MH: Started there. And in '41. Then, I like--family could have an apartment yet. So I moved into an apartment with a Jewish woman and her daughter; the husband was dead.

MS: Someone that you knew, or you were just assigned?

MH: No, no. Yes, I had to look for myself. I had known them before. But then they were in the same vicinity where we lived. And then I was approached by this man when I lived there, and I agreed. And then she was, she was picked up one night, this was already in '41. She was picked up and they got me, too. And her daughter was somewhere with a friend, a non-Jewish friend. So when I got into, where they got assembled all the people, I saw this man who approached me, and he said, "You're going to be out tonight again." And I was back.

MS: Then he got you out?

MH: Yes, immediately. And I went back to that apartment, and I was there by myself. So, because nobody bothered me, and I just went back, and I was there. And the people who lived above me--there was a three-story building, was not a high-rise, the people below on the first floor, we were on the second floor--on the third floor, they knew that I was there, and they were with us. They were Dutch non-Jews, they were with us, certainly. And I found out where her daughter is, and we got, through this friend who lived in the next street, she got everything out, first from our apartment, and then also my things I had in that apartment, and also the things from this woman. A lot of the things. Not furniture, but linens and clothing and things like that.

MS: And after the war, were you able to retrieve them?

MH: Yes.

MS: You were able to get them back?

MH: I got everything back. Everything but the groceries, which she apologized even, because we had, before we--in 1940, everybody was buying and buying things, you know, like soap and all those things, and she had them hidden, all this. She had eight Jewish girls, in a six-room apartment.

MS: Do you have any idea how she was able to physically hide these girls?

MH: Yes, she did. They knew, you know, after 9:00, Jews weren't allowed to go in the street. Of course, you had to wear the star. If you didn't wear the star, you were all right. You could risk it. And, so then I--they also went from house to house, and even if they didn't have a list, they knocked at her door. Now, in these buildings, she lived, this friend of mine, she lived in a high-rise, which the high-rise was what, eight stories it was a high-rise at that time, you know, it was many years ago. And then she lived on the ground floor. And when you had the ground floor, you had a garden. The others had a big balcony towards the back. And she had a garden house, and when somebody came and she saw, everything was dark, of course, you know, they had--as everything had to be dark, no lights in the street. And when she saw the Nazis coming, through the back kitchen door, those eight girls went into the garden house. And, you know, she was a very, very charming


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woman, and she talked to them, and she said, "Come in, and I'm here by myself." and you know...

MS: Would they come in and search the apartments?

MH: I don't know. I don't think they searched it. They believed her. And that she had several times. Now, they--my things, and things from other Jewish girls she had. She had, like, see like, on top, between the living-room and the dining-room, there was a hollow space, and they had opened the wall, and in there were hollow. In there were all the things--the radios, the linens, the, whatever. My silverware was hidden there. Even my quilts were there, my down quilts were there. Everything she had. She grabbed whatever she could. And so she--these girls survived. And when I came back, I lived with her.

MS: When you came back from where?

MH: From Auschwitz, from Bergen-Belsen, really.

MS: Well, that's the end of your story. So, where did we leave off with your particular episode, they had taken you into a school, and then you were released...

MH: I was out the same evening, the same evening I was out.

MS: OK. So tell us a little of how you functioned in the underground.

MH: OK. I got in, since I had worked in the Jewish Committee, through that he got me out somehow, and since I had worked there, and I had went there pretty much every day, and then we were, I was assigned to Westerbork. I was assigned to bring papers. I was what they call that time a courier. I was a courier. And I had permission to travel to the Hague to bring papers. See, the Jewish Committee had to work for the Nazis. They did, because they had all the papers there. They had everything there. And they just came, they were, they checked it. So, this was my job. I got papers to be sent. And then, when the action started, and they picked up Jewish people every night by alphabet...

MS: From lists of names?

MH: From lists of names. They had them all. So, of course, some went underground, like Anne Frank and her sister and her parents, they went underground, and some didn't. Some didn't have a chance anymore. It's very difficult, and you have to put yourself in that suddenly. You live there in peace, and suddenly people go to pick you up, you know, things like that. And it hit the Dutch people, Dutch-born people, always lived in Holland, very hard, because they lived in a country where there was no war, freedom, very big democracy...

MS: And no differentiation in religion?

MH: No. Definitely not. And, so, it was very, very hard for these people, and that's how they got them. Now, they had no room anymore, where to get all the Jews from Amsterdam. So the ghetto, formerly ghetto, which started in the 14th century, which is called the *Judenbeestrasse* [phonetic] which means the Jewish wide street. It had a gate, they still had it. That's where Rembrandt lived, and that's where all the people who came


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through from the Spanish Inquisition in the 14th century, where they, a lot of them lived there. A lot of businesses, a lot of diamond dealers, and things like that. Painters...

MS: It was a Jewish quarter?

MH: It was a Jewish quarter. But not anymore. Anybody could live there. But it was a Jewish quarter, and they built a big Portuguese synagogue, one of the most famous...

MS: In other words, like a section of the city...

MH: A section of the city, and that was the Old City. Now, the Old City, part of it, people had moved out, and moved into where we lived, in the new Amsterdam, and we lived in the southern part of the *Neve* [Dutch for new] Amsterdam. So there was a theater in that neighborhood which was closed because all the Dutch government had decided they will restore this with the same old buildings, to have it more like--because this was from the 14th century, they wanted to restore that. So this theater was empty. Across the theater was a Jewish orphanage, and that was empty because they had replaced, put them somewhere else because they wanted to rebuild and restore the whole section. And this man, by the name of Suskind, [phonetic], he was the leader of this, he also is in the book, Walter Suskind. Walter Suskind was my boss. OK? Now, he has, he talked to me about all this, and he said, "What we are doing now? We are going to try to save the children from transport." And what we did, that theater, we were assigned by the Germans, a group of 10, two women and eight men, yes, a group of ten, two women and eight men, to live in the orphanage across the street of the theater. Our duty was to register the infants in the theater. All the Jews they picked up had to be registered. Our duty was to take the children away from the parents, clean them, infants mostly, clean them, and bring them back into the theater. In Dutch, it was called the *Shauser*, that is like theater, really, a showplace, something like this literally translated. And this Walter Suskind said to us, said to me, that we are allowed, we get ration cards, and we have all this, but we have to register. And I, first I said to him, "You mean we have to work for the Nazis?" He said to me then, "Yes, what we are doing is a *mitzvah*." And then he explained to us, he explained to everybody, about how they're going to work it. By then, Holland had no cigarettes, no cigars, no liquor. We got everything to give the Nazis, especially liquor. Through the Mayor of Amsterdam, he was very helpful, we got ration cards, and the idea was this: when the children came into that orphanage, we had to clean them up, we had to put fresh diapers on them, and wrap them up in blankets, and bring them over for transport. When they were infant...

MS: Can I ask you a question? These children were taken away from...?

MH: From the parents. The parents were already across the street, but the children, they had to give to one of us ten. One of the ten. They had to give them, one of them, a child, you know, or children, infants mostly, and we had to--they didn't want them to be dirty or do it; the Germans wanted them clean. So that's what we did. Now--the truck picked up those children, and they were accompanied by the driver and maybe one or two other men or women, non-Jewish, and they went into the country and delivered the children

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to the farmers, mostly farmers, and gave them special ration cards, which were not, were copies, were not the real ones, and they kept the children. And this was going every night for quite a while. At times, we could get a bigger child in between. And those children--the parents were sent away without the children. We did not inform the parents what we did because we were afraid that they might talk. And this was our duty. We were sitting with the Nazis there, in Register also. Some of us had to register, and then we brought the children over, but they believed us. They gave--really not believed us, but we gave them so many things. We gave them cigarettes, and we gave them liquor, and they were mostly, they were pretty much drunk. And they didn't realize that we took the children into the big hall where their parents were, they didn't realize, that there was no child, we had a different exit. We knew exactly the whole layout of the theatre, and we went out the other way, got back to the orphanage, and that was it. And there were...

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*Tape two, side one*:

MS: OK. Continue with the story. The children were being taken out of the home.

MH: And I said, how... [not audible] OK. And this is the way we continued. And I was also, as I said before, I was a courier, which is really to bring papers, various papers from the Jewish Council to the Hague or to Westerbork. One day, I found out, through Walter Suskind, that two of the boys who--they were not with us, but they belonged to the same group, two Jewish boys were caught--also worked in a different department of the underground. They were caught. And they were in Westerbork. Since I could go in and out of Westerbork, I was chosen to go to Westerbork with false ID cards, to stay there one night, and to try to get these two boys through the checkpoint. They were around the age of 19 and 20. And I had all the papers in a separate compartment in my briefcase. It was sort of a huge wallet. And I went to the checkpoint--the checkpoint, at the checkpoint, the Jewish prisoners were working there. And when I got there, I had to show my ID cards, and I was assigned to one of the bungalows where people, where the prisoners, where they had still prisoners there--the only thing--they also had barracks. The Germans got that camp, Westerbork, and they left the bungalows, but they built big three-story barracks, sort of wooden barracks, and they put an electrified fence around the camp. And they had a prison in the camp, too, besides the barracks, they had also a prison. And when I checked in, I showed my papers, and somehow I had those two ID cards in a tiny little compartment, and they must have gotten out, how, I don't know, and when I walked down the street in Westerbork, I wanted to make sure that I had those, that everything was OK, my ID card, my own card, and all this, and as I looked, I couldn't find the cards for those boys, the two false ID cards, without a J for those boys. I couldn’t find them.

MS: You must have been terror-stricken at that time.

MH: I certainly was, and I went back.

MS: Back to where?

MH: To the checkpoint, and I talked to the fellow who was there at the desk, and I knew him quite well, and I said, "Did you see anything I left here?" He said. "No, I didn't see anything." And I asked him, "Who was here?"

MS: From the time you were there to the time you left?

MH: Right. "Who was in here?" He said, "Hans Totman." Then I knew my goose was cooked.

MS: Who was this Hans Totman?

MH: Hans Totman was the Assistant to the Camp Commander in Westerbork. He was a Jew, a journalist from Berlin. He was not just a--he spied for the Nazis against the Jews. He also was on a list of the Canadian Army when they came into Holland, and on the list of the British Army.

MS: As what? As a wanted...


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MH: As a wanted criminal. And, when I knew that he was there, I walked out and I walked back to the place I was assigned to stay overnight. I never made it. Right on the street, I was picked up by two SS men, and was put into prison. Three weeks in solitary confinement. Interrogation during the night, and I was asked questions: "Who, what did I want to do? Whom do I want to get out of Westerbork? And what am I doing in Amsterdam?" They never got anything out from me because I figured, if I do so, that whole group, the whole Jewish underground, would have gone up in blazes. So, I didn't.

MS: You [unclear] it, and were subjected to torture?

MH: Yes, I was subjected to torture, but I felt I couldn't talk. And they sent me cigarettes, I was allowed to have a cigarette. I never smoked, and they sent me cigarettes. And there were messages from Walter Suskind: "We know you, and you will not talk. You cannot talk." They had it hand rolled with that tobacco in there, and when you opened it up, there were messages: "We are trying to get you out. We are trying to do everything for you, but don't talk. You must not talk." They had that underlined and underlined. So after three weeks, I didn’t talk, no matter what they did. They had, all night long, water dripping- it was one of their punishments besides bodily punishment. And after three weeks, my cell door opened, and I was told that I will be transferred to a barrack. Then I knew that I’m going on transport, because why would they do that to me? They didn’t let me out. I was one week in the barrack, and I was told I’m going on transport. Not only was I told I’m going on transport, I was told that whatever clothes I have in my apartment, they have to come to Westerbork, because I need my clothes wherever I go to work camp. I need the clothes. So, I didn’t have so very much there, but I gave them the key. Of course, I couldn’t tell them that my girlfriend had taken out most of it, and they brought some clothes for me, and I had a suitcase, and they brought the suitcase, and that is how I had to be gone. I went on transport with a special escort.

MS: Was it just you alone?

MH: No, it was a regular transport. Oh no, they wouldn’t have wasted the money for me…

MS: No, no. I thought maybe this was a plan to get you released. You know, I

MH: No, it was a transport. And there was this man, Hans Totman, standing right at the platform. He wore the high boots like the Nazis, but not uniform. He was a Jew. And he said to me, "I'm sorry but you should have not worked against the German," when he saw me. Well, I had a special SS man with me. Didn't mean a darn thing. We were stuck into one of those cattle cars, and the journey was about three to four days. Once they opened up and threw some bread in, and once we could get out to have some water. And that was it. It was just standing-room-only practically. People died within the cars, there was no facilities, no way, no sanitary facility, nothing.

MS: You had no idea where you were going?

MH: We had no idea where we were going. So when we arrived, it was Auschwitz, and it was Birkenau. Birkenau was a camp, really, and Auschwitz, where you

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were, it was all Auschwitz. They had many, many camps around there, but it was all one big Auschwitz. But the transport and the gas ovens were in Birkenau, which was very close to Auschwitz. And, well, when I got there, first they--you had to take all your clothes off, put it on a pile, then you had to walk in front of the SS, and then they shaved your hair completely, and then you were divided up, like left, right and left.

MS: That was the selection?

MH: That was the selection. I was wondering why people with children didn't go to the right side, and I was chosen to go there and to pick out some clothes, which...

MS: To the right side?

MH: Right, it was the right side yes. And there was a heap of shoes from other prisoners before, and you had to pick out, if it fit or didn't fit, and you got a--no regular clothes, you got a uniform, blue and white stripes. You got a dress and a jacket, and that was it. Then you were assigned to your barrack in Birkenau. And, there was also three beds on top of each other, one three-stories, they were your bunk-beds, about four to five girls in one bunk. And then we got--every morning, was roll call. And then you got your rations, which existed of a can of coffee, which was a horrible brew, and a half a slice of, a half a loaf of black bread, and then you got again a soup, potato peel soup. That was your ration for the day, and that was it.

MS: Were you assigned to a work or a... ?

MH: No, we were--we did unproductive labor in the beginning when I came. We had to carry bricks from one end of the street to the next end of the street. Then I was assigned to work in the water drainage with pick and shovel. And then I had another assignment, they picked me out to work in the kitchen, and I thought, "Gee, I will get some more food." But I was only working in the prisoners' kitchen, carrying 50-pounds soup kettles with another girl. And we had to run with that, not walk. We had to run and that was our work which we had. We might have got a little more soup, but that was all, the same soup you got in camp, it was all. And one day, we were on roll call--most of it was in the morning, in the night, it was always counting, it was always roll call, and one day, an entourage of SS officers came. Not just the usual our, which they called the *kapo*, was the block *Älteste* [block elder]. The woman who was in charge. She was also a prisoner, but she wasn't Jewish.

MS: She was not Jewish?

MH: No. There was never a Jewish block *Älteste*, never a Jewish *kapo*.[5] Not as far as I know. And so, there were a few higher ranks coming in there from the SS, and they counted, and when he got to me, he stopped and took me out, and he said to me, "Are you Jewish?" I said, "Certainly". I had the star. There I had a different star, you know, the German Jews. And I said, "Yes." He said, "How come you are so light, and you have blue eyes, and you're blond?" I said, "Yes, I'm Jewish." OK, he was convinced I'm Jewish, even he saw all this. And he said, "Do you speak German?" I said, "Yes." "Can you write

[5]There were some Jewish *kapos*.

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German?" I said, "Yes." "Can you do German stenography?" (which I didn't), but I said, "Yes." And he said, "OK, out," and I went onto the jeep with another girl on the jeep, and we didn't know where we were going. No idea where we were going. And we finally were riding in his jeep and, for the first time...

MS: Did you go out of the camp environment?

MH: Yes, completely out. And the first time, I saw away from the crematorium, and I saw green, really, green hills and a lot of fields growing vegetables, all this; so that was the camp. The name of the camp was Budy. It was also Auschwitz, but it was Budy. They had--they were only like selected, sort of, not selected people, we were--there were 400, or more than that, Ukrainian girls there. These were girls who were picked up-in Germany in factories because Germany needed--had no people to work, men and women, to work in the factories, because the men were all in the war. And these girls were, most of them could not write nor read. And they were picked--they did not ever had seen a factory; they were from the little towns, little villages, little farms in the Ukraine. And they were runaway, because they were scared of the factory. So they picked them up, and they were put into that camp. Then there were the Jehovah Witnesses were there; they were in a separate camp, and there were doing, they were walking with the animals, with the geese, the chickens. They were the shepherds for all these animals they had there. And then they had a group of who were with us, were a group of 15 prostitutes, German prostitutes, who had went to bed with a non-Aryan, maybe a Turk, maybe, whatever they had--rather not Turkey at that time, but like an Italian or, wherever they had people from the occupied country. And they were with us. They had the privilege--most of the girls all the girls had hair, only, also a few Jewish girls had hair there. They didn't shave their heads. The others got packages; we did not. They had received packages from wherever they came from, from home, and we were all, we were together in that same camp. So I was told that I will be the secretary of this big *Oberscharfuhrer* – he had a big rank. He was the man in charge of all the agriculture which was planted in that camp...

MS: Within Auschwitz?

MH: Within Auschwitz. All the vegetables and potatoes and so forth were going to the Eastern front. They were transported to the Eastern front. And I was his secretary, and the other girl, she was a graphic designer before she came into Auschwitz, and she did all the designing and the plans for the planting for him. We were two Jewish girls working. Then they had a small hospital in that camp. Now, where we were working that was not the camp--it was his private house. In his private home, that was near the fence, near the freedom that was in the compound. And...

MS: Did you live there?

MH: No. No way. Every morning, we went there with a German guard and a shepherd, with his bayonet pointed towards us, if we would have stepped out or said anything. Then he had one, only the two of us in his house working, and he had a cook, who also did not live there, who was from the Ukraine, a Ukrainian girl. And then, they


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had a hospital, a small hospital. The doctor was Jewish, from Italy. They had a dentist from France, and then they had an assistant dentist from--she was from Germany. And then they had another Jewish girl who was working for another man nearby in the office. So--that's what saved my life. I would say that saved my life, because not that we were away from Birkenau, which was very important because we didn't have the smell everyday.

MS: And you knew, of course, what was happening.

MH: Of course we knew, and we didn't even care. We didn't care. So we knew that next day you didn't see somebody anymore. You knew they were taken to the crematorium. Now, to go back to that. I think I was extremely lucky, that's all I can say, because I had a small, wasn't called an operation, I had an ear infection while in Birkenau, and they had to open my ear, and they did not give you anesthesia, because they didn't even have anesthesia enough for their own. They didn't have the medicine. So, one of the Nazis said to me, "If you know what's good for you, you don't cry." One of the so-called doctors, I don't know if he was a doctor. And I didn't cry. And I was put on a wagon with all the others who went to the crematorium, but when I got to my block, I was let out for some odd reason, and came back to my barrack. So I was so sure, you know, that I was never come back to the barrack because it was terrible to go to a hospital. You couldn't get sick. So then, when I got to Budy, my life has really changed. My life and the life of this girl.

MS: How would you have spelled that word--Buddy?

MH: Buddy? Buddy. [Correct spelling is Budy.]

MS: And that was the name of the little camp, of the camp where the agriculture, where everything was planted.

MS: Now let me see if I'm following you correctly, Malvina. When you became sick with the ear infection, was this before...

MH: Before Budy. It was in Birkenau. That was in Birkenau.

MS: I see, before you were taken out by this German...

MH: Of course, I was one year in Budy in the winter, and that saved my life. Because I was inside. I did all his letters. He was a--to us he was sort of decent. That didn't mean that he would kill a man who stole something, stole an onion. He killed one man for that, one Jew, and the man, in the camp where the men were.

MS: Did you see any of these brutalities? Were you a witness to any?

MH: Oh, we knew it. There was a fence in between, but we knew it. We got everything; we knew exactly what was going on. Somehow we had people smuggled some notes out or things like this. We knew what was going on. But he was fairly decent to us. And we stole quite a bit. We went every night back to the camp with tomatoes, which was very necessary, and onions. They were our vitamins.

MS: Then you were taking your chances, too?

MH: Oh yes. The minute he was out of the camp, of his house, we went out, and the cook--she was also--she stole too, and she gave us things. We went down to the basement, and his mother had sent him jam and homemade things, and we took that all

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along. We couldn't manage every night, so we stuffed it into the--near the typewriter, and where the other girl--near her, in her drawer. And she always had thread and needle in her drawer. And one night, he told us that he got into the office because he wanted to sew a button on his uniform, and he opened the drawer, and he saw his mother's jam, and he saw, and he looked in the waste-paper basket, and we had that nicely covered, and he looked at all the fruit we had gotten, all the onions, all the tomatoes, and we couldn't take that every night. We took every night a little bit. And he--when we got into the office, the floor was full of that. Everything was out of the drawers laying on the floor, and he came in, and he said to us, to the girl and myself, he said to us that he is going to send us back to Birkenau, and that means that we are going to the crematorium. And we cried all day. And we told him that we give him our word of honor, and what he said, what the Jewish word of honor means, I couldn't repeat it. It was a very terrible four-letter word that was the Jewish word of honor would mean to him. And he said he will shave our heads again. So we cried, and he needed us because he knew that he could depend--she was excellent in her work, and I did my best. And he was used to us. And in fact, he was very unhappy with the cook because she couldn't cook very well. And I had my brother-in-law's sister from Holland; I had met her in Auschwitz on the street in Birkenau, and she worked in the underground in Auschwitz too in a munition factory that was underground. There was a munition factory...

MS: Oh, I thought you meant the other kind of underground...

MH: No. An underground factory. And, she wanted to get out. So I mentioned it to him that I know my sister-in-law. I said it's my sister-in-law, she would like the job. So he asked, "Is she Jewish?" So I said, "Certainly." "I can't take her, she would poison me."

MS: Well, the cook he had then was a non-Jew, a Ukrainian?

MH: Ukrainian. By the way, the Ukrainians were worse than the Nazis. They told us, if they had freedom, they would kill us. They would slaughter us. We were only six Jewish women there, in that whole camp of about 500-600 people.

MS: In Budy?

MH: In Budy, yes. So, he must have forgiven us, and he said, "OK." We said we would never do that, but then the winter came and we had no--nothing on our heads. We had hair then, short, but we had hair. So we realized that his mother had sent him material for curtain, and Vera was a great, so handy in sewing, so she made two kerchiefs for us, for each kerchiefs--it was afterwards, we had kerchiefs. And we just figured, well we have to, when we kept on doing things again, you know.

MS: He didn't catch you?

MH: He didn't catch us, no. So, that's what we did, and that was partly, I say that was our survival. Something else was a survival, which I heard recently from this girl, I finally found her.

MS: The girl that you worked with?

MH: Yes, Vera was here.

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MS: Would you tell us about it, please?

MH: Yes, OK. Well, let me tell you first, OK, I can tell you that. You want me to say it now, or later?

MS: Now, yes.

MH: OK. Vera and I, we became great friends. And when we were liberated, in 1945, everybody had to go back to the country where you came from, regardless where you were born. She came from Czechoslovakia, from Prague. She went back; I went to Holland. We wrote to each other, and–in Holland. When I came to this country, I took her address, and she sent me pictures. She had gotten married--from her husband, when they got married in front of City Hall in Prague, and she sent me a few other pictures, and she was very happy. When I came here, I had the pictures, and I had her address, and I wanted to write. Then, of course, after we were married. And when we were married, and I said to my husband, "Look, I would like to write to Vera." And he said," Where does she live?" I said, "Czechoslovakia, I have her address." And he said, "You can't do that." because at that time, Senator McCarthy was around, and he said, "This is no good, because everybody is a Communist. If you do that, and that letter might get into false hand, we are in trouble, because Czechoslovakia was a Communist country." In 19... a year and a half ago, yes, a year and a half ago, our Rabbi organized a trip to Czechoslovakia.

MS: All right, let me interrupt you. I want that part of the story, but I think we're going to have to come back to it because I don't want to lose too much of the thread. All right, now, you were saying that you were back in, you were still in Budy, and you were still able to do a few things to help yourselves through. All right. And then what happened, how long did you stay with this officer, with Vera in this office?

MH: One year.

MS: One year, OK.

MH: And in January, early January 1945, Auschwitz was liquidated, and we had--we knew it because we saw the Russian planes flying over Auschwitz, we--saw that. Not that they didn't bomb for some odd reason. I don't know if they didn't know what it was, but we saw the Russian planes. And there was an announcement in Budy, and that the whole camp of Auschwitz will be liquidated, and we are going to move west, towards the west, away from the Russian, the Russian border, Polish border; we are going. That was the famous march, the famous transport by foot. We were thousands and thousands of people.

MS: And you were included in that march?

MH: We were included in that march. Vera and I were given, by another SS man, who always told us that he doesn't believe that Germany will win because it's going to an end. It’s very bad on the Eastern front, and he told us, he is giving us each a pair of boots, because he said, "When you go with those shoes, you will not survive."

MS: Was this the same officer that... ?

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MH: No, no, it was another one who had another office where another Jewish girl was working. But he came to us too because they worked sort of hand in hand, and he told us that, and he gave us each a pair of boots, regular Nazi boots, those heavy boots. And that's how we took off. Walking, we walked about three days and two nights: We walked over the River Vistula. It was 35, at least 35 below zero. A river like the Vistula, is a huge river, was frozen that we walked across, and we rested once, and the announcement was whoever steps out will be shot because we had guards with us. They had to walk with us, and they drove on their motorcycle next to us, and whoever went out, whoever collapsed was just killed right there and left there. So we finally arrived in a, in Silesia, Upper Silesia, more close to Germany, where we rested, and we got something to eat, some coffee and some bread, and then we were put in another, in one of those famous cattle cars, and we arrived in Buchenwald, the famous camp where the Commandant was a woman who made lampshades out of human skin. We only stayed there for a short while, not even a week. Without any, nothing, not doing anything. After that, we went again into a cattle car, and we were...

MS: That camp also was evacuated?

MH: After us. Afterwards, that camp was also evacuated. But when we were left, it wasn't evacuated then. And then we went from there to Bergen-Belsen, and that's where we arrived, in Bergen-Belsen. Now, Auschwitz was bad, but Bergen-Belsen was the worst. Bergen-Belsen was the pits. The people, they were laying dead on the street. Nothing was done. We had to carry the dead and put them into a field and throw them on top of each other. We had typhoid, from the typhoid, [typhus come from lice] the typhoid came from lice, lice in your clothes. We got some clothes, and we got some things, and it was terrible. We had nothing to do. There was no work, but we did, we had to bury the--not really, we had to 'throw away the bodies', we just had to throw them and they burned them somewhere. And we stayed there from January until April--April 15, 1945. We were all quite sick. We had still typhoid, and...

MS: You were made to work, regardless?

MH: No, we didn't work. We couldn't work. We didn't; there was no work for us. There was no work. Was just a dying camp, you know. They just let you die. On April 15, the--I felt already a little better, and Vera felt better too, because we knew, I knew a nurse from Holland, I knew her in Amsterdam, and we were very friendly, and she was there too, and she worked in the so-called hospital, and she gave us some injection in the barrack, and that helped us. And so, we noticed that no guards were there; everybody had left. One morning we get up, nothing.


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*Tape two, side two*:

MH: And it didn't take very long, a few hours later, we saw our guards, the German guards, the women and the Commandant coming back with white handkerchiefs. And waving the white handkerchiefs. And when we saw them, we knew something was wrong there. They had no weapons with them, nothing. And then we saw the jeep, a couple of jeeps coming in with British soldiers, and they told us that "This is it. We have found this camp, and you are free now." Of course, we couldn't run out and things like that, they had to organize first. First they took the Commandant, and they said everything came over the loudspeaker, that the camp will be burned, and they are going to transfer us to a military camp in regular brick buildings, and there we are going to stay there until we're well, and we're going to go back to our country. And then they said, "Whoever would like to come to a market place, they're hanging the Commandant and his henchmen." And you know, we danced around that, and we were so, you think you're not human. And they hanged him, they hanged about three or four, and then they took all the women guards, shaved their heads, the British did that, and they had to clean all the toilets and clean up what was laying on the street. They did that. And then they shipped them into prison camps. And then they had again, on the loudspeaker, and they gave us so much to eat, and whatever...

MS: But this was very bad, though for the people...

MH: Yes, it was very bad. A cousin, a second cousin of my mother was there, and she died in there from eating. So then we left the camp, and we went to this town near Hanover.

MS: This is where the British...

MH: The military camp, yes, where the British took us, and we were assorted in these various houses. They were regular military big brick houses, and the Dutch and the Belgian were in one house, and I think the French were with us. And then the Italian and the Greek and, you know, they had assorted, and we had to--and they had told us that we will have to go back once we are pretty much in good shape, they will send us back to the country, like to Holland or to Belgium or to France, to wherever they could go. The only ones, they said, will not go out of this camp will be the German and the Polish Jews, because there's no place for them to go. That's when they started with the displaced person camps. That's when they came into existence. So, then they needed people who speak English, and I spoke English before, and I helped them, and I went, you know, announcements and translation into German...

MS: So you went to work then for the British Army?

NH: Yes. I went to work then, but then they noticed that people died from eating. So there was a new announcement, "No food anymore, just plain bouillon and crackers." That's all what we got for awhile. They gave us chocolates, whatever they had they gave us. White bread, and we hadn't seen that, you know, and everybody grabbed it. And, I had a very lovely experience. I got to talk to one of the British soldiers, I was on a truck


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with him with the announcement translation from English into German, and I said, "You know, I have a brother in London." He said, "How old is he ?" And I told him, and he said, "No, he can't be in London; there is no men in London." And he said, "You know his name? Write it down." He said, "Look, we have the, a lot of them come through, all the combat troops come through Hanover. I hang it in the mess hall. Maybe you find him." It took only three days when my brother found me.

MS: Oh. how amazing

MH: And he was not allowed to come into the camp, so he must have talked to his Commander, and he let him get in for only very, very shortly. Because he was a combat, they didn't let him in. These were special troops who were there.

MS: Well, was your brother being sent to a front at that time?

MH: Yes, he came from the front, rather, he was then sent into, he went to Belgium. It was already Holland, yes. He was still in Germany. When I was in Holland, he was still in Germany, and then he was transferred to Belgium, in the depot, what was it, he brought all the food, the...

MS: Quartermaster?

MH: Quartermaster's depot. He was there, yes. He was no longer in the fighting, no more.

MS: But they only let you see him for a very short period of time?

MH: Very short period. Yes.

MS: So what happened then? Did you make plans to... ?

MH: He looked at me, and he said, "What are you doing here?" That's what he said. And then we were sent to Holland. My girlfriend Vera went to Czechoslovakia, and I was sent to Holland, and I came back to Holland, I couldn't go back to Amsterdam. Nobody could go back to the town where they lived. We were put in, at the German border into a school which was converted into a hospital, because we still had germs. They could not let us go into the free world with our germs. So we were examined like twice, three times a week.

MS: It was sort of isolation?

MH: Isolation. That was an isolation. Special rations because Holland after the war had rations yet. Special, very, very careful with food, and all this, and then we were after that, and it was April, I think, we stayed there for four weeks yet, and after this, in the isolation, yes, in that town in the hospital. Of course, we were treated very human. Even so, some said we are hungry, and we had only certain food, they tried very little with us, not to eat suddenly so much. And then I got back to Amsterdam, and in Amsterdam, there was nobody but that one friend...

MS: The same woman?

MH: The same woman who had my things. And I...

MS: When you say there was nobody, what happened...

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MH: Nobody in my family, yes. And no one I knew, no cousins, not my family in Rotterdam. They were all gone; they were taken away, the whole family.

MS: Well, at that point, I guess you didn't know what the next step would be in trying to find someone.

MH: Right. Well, they had everywhere--I found friends of my parents in the Hague, but she was married to a non-Jew. So they were safe, yes, and their children, so they were safe. And so then from, in Amsterdam, I wrote to my girlfriend. I had her address...

MS: This is Vera?

MH: Yes. Not Vera, that was my girlfriend who had all the things, and I lived with her. I lived with her until I came here.

MS: How long a period of time was that, that you remained in Holland?

MH: Holland? Until 1947.

MS: I see. For two years then?

MH: Yes, for two years I stayed yet.

MS: And did you go back to work?

MH: Yes. That was when I worked for that, as a manufacturer's model.

MS: I see. Tell us a little about that.

MH: Well, I got the job through--we knew these people, and we had met these people before, and somehow they had survived. They were friends of this lawyer I had told you, and by coincident I met him on the street, and I had just shortly been back, and he said, "Well, would you want to work for us?" and that's what I did. I worked until I came here, yes. And that's where I worked, and then I tried to find--my first trip was going to Westerbork. I wanted to see if anybody was left.

MS: You went back...

MH: Right, and I found some of the people who worked in the underground together, and I couldn't find Walter Suskind. Him I couldn't find. And then I found out that he didn't come back.

MS: He was also shipped out, and was also... ?

MH: Yes, he was shipped out. Nobody knows where. The family, he, his wife and his mother and the child.

MS: And, you were never able to locate anyone else that you worked with in the underground?

MH: Yes, I did. One, we did. I did locate him in Holland and we were in Holland yet together, and they went to America. But we lost contact somehow, yes. One fellow who was with me, he is in California somewhere. I think I even have his address--I ought to, because we're going to be there. Let's see if I can find it.

MS: And you never, you could never get any information as to whatever happened to Martin Sternfeld, your first husband?

MH: No. This is all I have, nothing.

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MS: Nothing beyond that?

MH: Nothing beyond that. Nothing could I find out, not what has happened to his sister, really nothing. And the girl which was in Auschwitz which was my brother-in-law, is my brother-in-law's sister, she arrived. We met in Holland again. Her parents didn't survive.

MS: And your mother?

MH: My mother, I have no idea.

MS: Because she had gone back to Danzig after spending a little time with you in Holland?

MH: She had gone back to Danzig, yes, and I have no idea. And that is the story. And I came here...

MS: And your brother too, your youngest brother, you never...

MH: No, never, never know what happened.

MS: And when you came here, then you met your present husband?

MH: Yes.

MS: Here in the United States?

MH: In Philadelphia, yes, and we got married a year later.

MS: Well, when you came to America, did you need a sponsor, then?

MH: Yes. Friends, I have no relatives here. Friends of my brother, they found out, they kept in touch with my brother during the war, and with my sister-in-law. And then they found out that I am in Holland, so they didn't even ask me. They sent packages and they said, if I would like to, I should come here, and they sent me affidavits.

MS: And these were people that you yourself did not know?

MH: Yes. I knew him, I knew the friend because they came from Russia, and they were on the way to America, and they stayed for a few years in Danzig, but he was my brother's age--my oldest brother, so seven years apart, and they went to school together. And my father did a lot for them because they had no money, and he did quite a bit for the whole family. And when they came--and they always wrote to us on holidays, and when they came here, and I met even the old people, the fellows are dead by now, the fellow's parents, and they said, “They never forgot what your father did for us.”

MS: I was thinking--it would seem very unusual just out of the clear blue sky that somebody would sponsor you. That there had to have been a reason for this.

MH: Right, that was the reason. They wanted to do whatever possible, and I lived with them in Wynnefield, and they were extremely, extremely nice to me. I was told that I'm not a refugee, that I'm one of them and that I live with them, and when we got married there, of course, we had a very little short wedding in the rabbi’s study. But they did all this for us.

MS: Tell me, after meeting your brother for the first time in Hanover, did you, and then you went back to Amsterdam, you were never able, you never made contact with him?

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MH: Yes, of course, in Amsterdam. He was in Brussels. He came over with all the food possible. He was in the right position, he was with the Quartermaster.

MS: I see. But you didn't have any desire to go to England?

MH: Oh yes, I did. In fact, I had money from my uncle, who lived in India, to come to India, and he sent me money for the trip. My brother tried to get me in from Bergen-Belsen, after the liberation. He tried through the Red Cross for me to get to England. But, they wouldn't let me in because I had typhoid germs. And I had to go through channels. It didn't work like that, that I was picked out and sent to England. I had to go through channels, had to go back to Holland, and all this.

MS: And then you would have had to go through on their immigration quota and all that, I would imagine?

MH: Right, right.

MS: Even though you had a brother in England?

MH: Right. Yes, I could have worked in England as a domestic or as a nurse that I could have worked. And, I went to England three times from Holland during the two years, and he came to Holland, and he was still in the army. He was discharged, I think, in Christmas 1945, he came back to London. And, but I have been there, and all this together. So that's actually my life. I wanted just to tell you what happened with Vera.

MS: Yes, let's put that on the tape.

MH: Now, as I said, we went with our Rabbi for a reason to Czechoslovakia, a very small group, because we had a little Torah which came from a small town from Czechoslovakia, and our Rabbi's quite a stickler and he couldn't find out what happened to the Jews. So he organized a trip. I had no address of Vera, but I had found her picture, and the picture on the back said the name of the photographer and the address of the photographer. And he had then, in turn--well, I took the picture along, and I figure I find out where the street is.

When we got to Czechoslovakia, we were assigned to the State Tourist Bureau, and from the State, we got a guide. And I--once we got more acquainted with the guide--she lived, she didn't live with us in hotel, but she went with us wherever we were going, she told us her husband who was non-Jewish was in a concentration camp. He fought for the free Czechs, for the underground in Czechoslovakia, and I told her about this girl, that she was born in Prague, she lives in Prague, and I showed her the street. I said, "Just tell me, where is the street and the name of the photographer?" She said, "Don't go there because no store is privately owned. They all belong to the State. Every store, every department store, every hotel, is State-owned." So, our Rabbi had made contact with Jewish families in each town where we were, in Prague and in Pilsen, and he made a contact with the family in Prague through a son who lives in the United States. We were invited one evening to go there, and I took the picture along. And I said, "It's crazy, I don't have a name. I know her as Vera, but I don't have her name." So the lady of the house takes a look at the picture, and this was 1946, she said, "I know one man there. She is in the middle, and I don't know


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her husband, I know the other man. Leave me the picture, and I will find out, no matter what time it will be." Three months later, I got a letter exactly what happened to Vera, exactly her whole life history since 1946. She is no longer in Prague; her husband died in Prague. She lives in Germany. I wrote to her, yes, I was very much surprised, that I will not come to see her, but if she would come to see us--because I do not go to Germany. And, so, she wrote and she was very much, she said, she only cried when she--and she came last for Rosh Hashana; she was here.

MS: She came?

MH: She came here, she stayed with us two weeks.

MS: How wonderful

MH: And I just wrote a letter yesterday. She wrote to us, and she is very unhappy in Germany. She has two sons; her husband died in Prague. They were on vacation when the Communists came to Czechoslovakia, in Bulgaria. So they, they went to Vienna, stayed in Vienna, and her husband wanted to go back. They had him on a list--he was somewhere connected with the entertainment business, and they somehow, he was on a list, and he went to Prague, and he was arrested. He got sick there, and he died there. And she stayed with the two sons. They were ready to immigrate to Canada, so they were there, and she had a Czech friend who lived in Munich, and she said, “You can stay in our apartment for a few months with the children,” and what she did .. and that's where she is. She has her own apartment now, and the sons are there. One son was in Canada and came back, and she is very, very unhappy. She wrote again. She said she is so jealous that we have all the friends and we have a synagogue and...

MS: It seems so strange that she didn't opt to even go to Canada when she had the opportunity..

MH: I don't know, she had--well, then, she didn't have anymore, the opportunity, but now she has the opportunity, but I guess she wants to stay with her son. So in her last letter she wrote that she is going to Prague again. She shuttles back and forth because she is so happy there. She has her friends there.

MS: It's interesting though, at least she, having had all that experience in the concentration camps, and then going after the war, having to become involved in the Communist regime, so that her life really has been a turmoil almost constantly. We don't realize how fortunate we really are.

MH: Yes, and how fortunate I am, that I have my health, at least, you know. I have a bum back, and things like that. I have to have something wrong.

MS: Yes, which is one of the questions on the list. Have you suffered any ailments in your life, you know... ?

MH: My ailment was not really, was my .. I have a very bad back, and I had, I developed a hernia, which I just had repaired, a few weeks ago.

MS: And this you feel is all related to your experiences in the concentration camps?

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MH: When I was examined in Holland when we first got into that hospital in Holland, the doctor said to me, "Do you know that you have a hernia?" And I said, "No, I didn't even notice it," because you didn't pay attention to all those things. And he said, "Well, go to your doctor and have him watch it." Well, my doctor was a Jewish doctor he didn't come back; so I went to another doctor. He said, "Well, it's very small," and I had this all the time, and now I had it done after 37 years.

MS: You finally had it corrected.

MH: Yes, and I'm very glad about that. But with my back I have problems. I'm under constant, pretty much--do my exercises and, that is definitely from hard labor, you know, because I was never a giant.

MS: No, you're a very small person. Let me ask you this--it was very interesting that this German officer in Budy more or less was, I won't say attracted to you, but that he took an interest in you. You never knew what his end was, whether he was...

MH: No, I knew from one person, I had found out. I have a lawyer who is here and in Germany. He was the Assistant Prosecutor at the Nuremberg trial. He is really from Germany.

MS: What was his name?

MH: Dr. Kempner. And he has an office in Lansdowne, and he also has, I don't know what, if he's still doing now, because by now he is much older too, and he was in Frankfurt, and he had written to me quite often besides getting my restitution and all this. He had to do that because I never lived in Germany, see, that was a little difficult. But, he wrote to me that they found a woman which I knew in the Hague. She was a Nazi, and she was in charge of all this concentration camp business, but in the Hague.

MS: Did they ask you to come to be a witness against her?

MH: Yes, But then I got--they asked me to come to be a witness, and I think that was in Munich or in Nuremberg, no, Munich, I think, and they had caught her, but then I got a letter, a very nice letter, from the Judge, telling me that she confessed.

MS: So there wasn't a need for you...

MH: The confessing is that she was two years in prison, and she is probably out. I don't know if she is still alive, but that's what happened. And, that's what the story is.

MS: Well, I want to thank you very much, Mrs. Herzfeld. It was a very, very interesting conversation.

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