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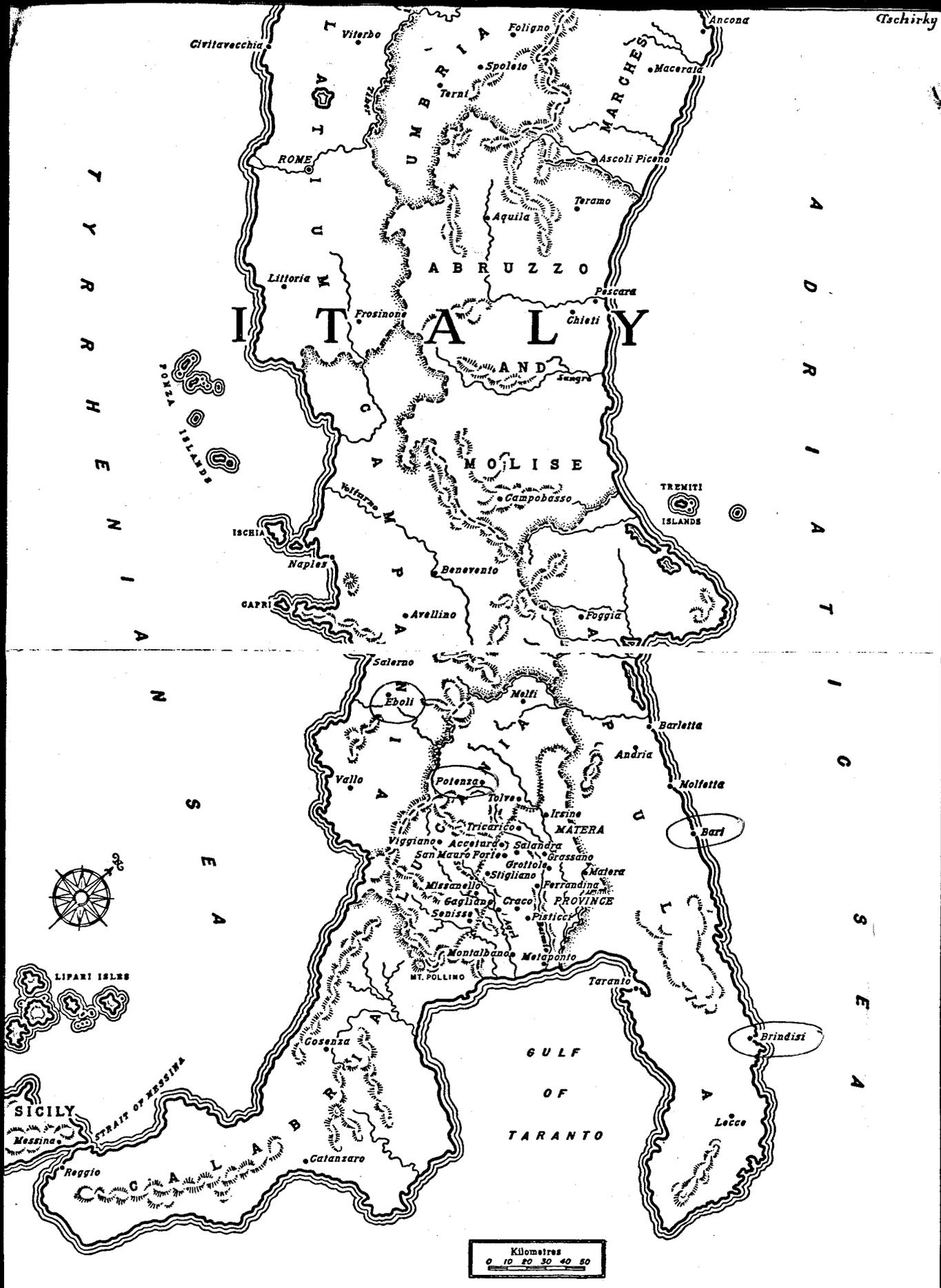
Grott, Alice & Belo
Czechoslovakia to
Italy
Jewish Survivors

ORAL HISTORY
of
ALICE and BELO GROTT

as told to Gemma Grott
December 1984

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Belo Grott

Belo Grott
circa 1949



Alice Grott
circa 1949

ALICE GROTT

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

gg: Tell me some things about how you were raised, a brief history.

ag: I was born into a middle income family in a small town in of Kremínca Czechoslovakia with older parents. My mother was already 35 or so. So I was very precious to them. My mother was born in 1889 as Erna Kohen. My father was Eugene Frisch and he was born in 1892. My father loved me very much. He was one of these people who liked to have toys and I was one of his toys. He like nice pretty things. He was a very handsome man. I was very cared for, worried over, and very much loved. But I was an only child. That was in 1922.

I had a normal childhood. My father a was travelling salesman and came home on weekends and always brought little gifts with him (the later years of his life). He never failed to bring me a trinket, a chocholet, something and was very generous that way. He died in 1934, I was 11 years old. Then my family situation changed; grandmother came to live with us, my mother opened a little store and I had to help in the household and was no longer that happy family.

I was pretty shy and didn't have too many friends. When it came to about 1935, I lost even the few friends that I had because of the anti-Semitism that started to be strongly felt about then. And my friends told me openly that they would love to be friends with me but their parents were afraid that it would harm them. Then I started finding Jewish friends and a Zionist organization and then found a "home" again, a sense of belonging to a group of people where I felt very comfortable and there I met papa. That was about 1938/9.

gg: Tell me more about how you met my father.

ag: I met him when he was in the military. In Czechoslovakia the Czech and Slovak soldiers were mixed throughout Czechoslovakia. Then it was starting to be a division where the Slovak soldiers wanted to come home and serve in their own land. There was a big shifting of the military and a new garrison was opened for the first time in the Kremínca where I lived and that's where he was stationed.

He came to the Zionist organization. He had been a Zionist all his young life, was the backbone of it for we were all inexperienced being very young people without much background except what the books told us that we were reading. But he had the knowledge because he had belonged to bigger organizations. He was one of the leaders in different places and we got acquainted.

When the holidays came he was invited to our home for the holidays and he started courting me. Then he moved to another city and he started writing to me. Everyday I got long, long letters. Every day. He didn't have anything else to do as he was on an outpost somewhere with nothing to

do with his time. So he would write these long letters, half of which I didn't understand even. I was 16 years old and here he could show off his knowledge of words and books and quotations of Marx and Lenin. All the quotations I got!

Then my mother realized we couldn't live there anymore and would have to emigrate. He came late one evening saying he had to leave the next morning and wanted to marry me. Marry me? I thought, what should I do with getting married? But then he talked to my mother and my mother said, well she doesn't know how to cook yet. He said, "Well, I teach her." Those words I never will forget. It lasted with me 45 years, he's still trying to teach me. He was a likeable man, my mother, my grandmother liked him and I was a child and I had a man. When corresponding, I told him my mother was making arrangements to leave and go illegally to Palestine. She made all the arrangements and even to get him released from the army. It was two years compulsory service. She accomplished all these things and we left.

gg: How was she able to get him released from the army?

ag: Because he was leaving the country. Out of political reasons. We could get out of Czechoslovakia, we were able to get the permission. He was towards the end of his army time. My mother was a very clever person and learned who to go and who to speak to. He was released from the army, he came to Kremnika, we got married and three days later we left for Italy where we were supposed to meet a Greek ship which would bring us illegally to Israel. We got married July 25, 1939. The wedding was one day, the next day we left. Everything had been packed and sent away already.

ITALY

We came to Italy. First we went to Milano where we stayed a few days, maybe a week. This was all with my mother. Then we went to Brendisi where we were to meet other people from Vienna and other cities of Czechoslovakia and so on. The ship never showed up. We could not enter Italy with any possessions because we entered as tourists so we only had a back pack with only a few clothes. We told them we were going to be in Italy 10 days or two weeks and took only that much with us. But we were stuck in Brendisi for one month and stayed in hotels but were not able to pay for the hotels. We didn't have any means. We got together, all these people, and we were cooking things together. We went to the market and bought the cheapest just to make ends meet. We all went hungry, really hungry. Luckily it was already fall and the grape harvest was happening. As we went for walks, the people from the wagons filled with the harvested grapes were throwing us grapes and that saved our lives.

gg: Why were they throwing you grapes?

ag: We weren't asking. But you know how in a harvest they want to share and that was a custom that they throw the harvest to the people. I don't know if they knew that we needed it or if it was just what they did. But we never went to the fields and picked it ourselves where it was bountiful. We wouldn't consider doing that because that was their private property, it would have been stealing. Oh they were soo good,

such long green grapes, you never saw or tasted such grapes. Especially coming from Czechoslovakia, for sure we never saw it before, coming from a country where grapes were eaten only in September and only as a delicacy. Now in United States you see them but they don't taste like they did in Italy because they're artificially grown, you know fast grown.

We were there during the Jewish holidays. It was warm and nice and had a real Yom Kipper, we fasted because we really didn't have anything to eat. But I have to tell you, we owed the hotel owners money but the police didn't let the owners put us out on the street. They had to keep us in the hotel rooms because the police didn't know what to do with us. If they put us on the streets, what would the police do? Put us in jail? Then they would have to feed us. So we stayed in the hotels until we got help from the Jewish organizations from Milano, Rome, Genova, etc. That was about two months. There was war going on already. Germany had declared war on Poland on September 2, 1939.

gg: When did Germany go into Czechoslovakia?

ag: Oh, they were there already before we left. They went first into Sudetenland and then the soldiers were retreating and all that upheaval. They went into Sudenland with the reason that there were Germans there and they came to liberate them. And during the negotiations of Chamberlain about Czechoslovakia he sold out. That's why the seperation of the Czeck and Slovak soldiers. Ask your father, he was in it and can tell you.

gg: What did the Jewish Organizations do?

ag: They paid for our hotel stay, paid our train trips to Genova. From there we started to make different arrangements to go to Israel/Palestine again. We didn't have money, it was more about getting affidavit, paper, More than money you needed contacts. We wrote back to our family in Czechoslovakia and asked them to help us. One of my cousins tried. An affidavit to get to Israel was very hard to get. Then we were supposed to go on another transport, the Rhodos transport we called it because that transport ended up in Rhodos Island. It never got to Israel and they all ended up in jails. It was one of those ships that got taken over. Our fate was very good to us because they ended up in big hardship until they got back to Italy and ended up in one of the camps in Italy.

GENOVA

We were in Genova when the war with France started. We were always trying to get out to Israel, our whole existence was around that. The Jewish community was giving us soup. Genova is a port city and French ships were bombing Genova with cannons. We were into the shooting war much sooner than other parts of Italy because we were very close to France. You would never know where the bombs would hit. It was very bad but first I want to explain how we lived.

We lived in a household. What the Italians did was live in big apartments and rented out individual room in the apartment. Everybody has his space in the large kitchen and you paid rent to the landlord. To make

ends meet, because we were very hungry all the time, we cooked for a few single people who were in the same situation we were in. That way we could get a little more to eat.

They gave us a little money for what we cooked, the cheapest foods, soups, just to keep us warm. Everybody gave some money to use and my mother and I were cooking for these other people so that we were sharing the meals together. Through that, we could have an extra meal. That was our pay for cooking, the extra food. Then the Jewish community was doing a soup kitchen where they gave soup and a roll for lunch. We stood in lines. There I got a job. But before that job I had another job.

While we were standing in line, people were coming to us asking if we wanted to come to work as house-maids. They hired me in one of these houses. It was very hard work just to wash all the dishes. Italians eat two big meals and the household was seven people. In the morning when I came there the dishes were there from the night before. I washed all that plus cleaned and other things that needed to be done. One interesting thing though, they said they wanted me to have a meal with them at the table, they didn't want to keep me as a servant because my intelligence was not the stature of a maid. The work was, yes, but not my social standing. So I ate with them at the table. They called me in after the first two courses were served. Then I could sit down with them at the table and I got food that they put on my plate. After I was done with that, they said I could leave while they continued eating. Not more food than what they thought would be enough. Usually maids ate in the kitchen but because I had this special status I could eat with them. Papa was waiting for me downstairs at the time I was leaving and always with some food because I was dying from hunger. There was always someone in the kitchen so I couldn't eat any of the leftovers.

They must have been very rich people. Their objects in the house, and the way the cooking was going on, etc. showed to me they had money. There wasn't a general food shortage at that time either because it was still in the beginning of the war. But I didn't stay there too long because I found work in the community kitchen.

That work in the community kitchen was wonderful for us. They gave work only to women because the man doesn't work in the kitchen but there was a lady from Poland and myself and in the evening when we were done serving the soups, then the men came and helped us peel the potatoes. There was always a sack of potatoes to be peeled. Actually the volunteer "ladies" came to serve the soups, you know how these things go, and when they left the kitchen was left over to us to clean up, wash the dishes, and prepare the food for the next day. The men came to help peel the potatoes or we would never have come out of there. That was very good for us because we had extra rolls and extra potatoes and could take home potatoes. Meanwhile my mother was cooking for the other people.

You know food is a very important thing. It's not what it is, it's so your stomach should be full because hunger is very debilitating. The whole world, beautiful Genova, didn't look like Genova. When I got that job, I was so overjoyed. We spend most of our time in the parks. When you don't have a social life you go there to meet your own people. In

certain parks you meet all the immigrants. To celebrate my job we went to buy a little piece of chocolate. I remember it was a little triangle piece of chocolate and we cut it in three pieces and celebrated.

But we were not unhappy. When you are young, you take everything in stride. You take the best of everything, you make a game of it, your fantasies are still running, you still build castles in your mind. Everything is a new experience. Really, castles. Genova is beautiful, it has very nice surroundings, really on the Riviera. You see gorgeous homes with swimming pools and everything. And here we were dreaming of owning one of those. That was a natural fantasy. We walked around and we weren't unhappy, the sun was shining. I came from the cold country of Czechoslovakia and you come into that sun shine! The Italians are such nice people, very gracious, even if they don't give you, they make you feel good. And I was young and good looking and men especially were very nice to me. When I wanted something I knew that if I want to, I could get it.

I had one experience, there was a man who said that we would go together in one of these rich neighborhoods and knock on doors and tell them we were immigrants and ask for help - really begging. I did it with him once and we made very good money but I couldn't do it again. I did it that one time in order to please him. I think he was a professor with lots of degrees and very intelligent. He would get dressed up very elegant and I got dressed up as much as I could so we made a good impression. The people couldn't say no to you because you didn't look like a begger. But after that one time I said I would rather go in the soup line. I said I was not so bad off yet that I could go begging. He continued doing it and made a good living out of it. Panhandling is what you call it today. Very degrading, very humiliating.

The Jewish community of Italy didn't want to have too much to do with us. Usually they don't. They want to live their lives and don't want to be bothered. The American community did the same thing. They give you that piece of bread but "don't touch my life". "I felt good by giving you bread."

The same thing when they employed the people, they were really only exploiting them but they didn't see it as exploitation, they thought they were doing a favor. They don't want to face, to be involved in someone else's lives. They contributed to the community and what the Jewish community did for us was through the officers, not the people themselves. Their private lives did not want to be interfered with. They were willing to give money but not their time, or they would come to the soup kitchen and work with "white gloves." I call it white gloves because of the attitudes, nice aprons, dished out the soup and left, never looking in the peoples' eye, with no personal involvement.

I noticed the same thing here. All the volunteers do it, they help you but not with their private lives, not personally. It's the same thing I do when I see a patient, I give her my telephone number but never my address because I don't want her to call me more than once or twice or come over; there are no friendship ties. I think about that very often even while I'm doing it, why there are those separations. When I am

there, spending time with her, I make her feel like I am her equal, I'm her friend because I know what she's going through but as soon as I leave there and I know I did my little piece of giving, that's all that I want to do -- I don't want to do more. Freedom of privacy? When I experienced it from one side I was very hurt by their actions but I see now, 45 years later that I'm doing the same thing, in a different situation.

gg: How did you feel about Ruth Gruber's book, The Haven, and how much she got totally involved with the people?

ag: Yes, there are a lot of very dedicated people here, especially American women. But still they don't call people to their homes for a cup of coffee. They did everything, made drives, raised money, bought clothes, anything they needed, they loved it so that the ladies can get together and sew curtains. That was the best project for them. But they didn't call them for a cup of tea. Got it? If someone called me today and said that community needs this and that, I'd be there, I'd say "How wonderful we can do something." It's just I'm not willing to make a private commitment alone, everything has to go through organizations. It's alienated that way.

I'm taking food regularly to the Jewish community center, I don't want to leave my name because it doesn't matter, I don't want thank you notes. And I feel like I'm doing something good and that's the same thing as the ladies in Syracuse did.

There was a time in Brendisi, we lived on the third floor, papa couldn't make the stairs from hunger, he was so undernourished already. In Brendisi we allotted ourselves one bread for each of us--they were those very thin breads and every morning that was our bread with the cheapest jelly they were selling. Or we ate it all in one breakfast or we ate it in three meals, it was up to each of us how we did it. But the grapes really helped us a lot. I don't know if they knew that we needed it or if it was just what they did.

Genova was a beautiful city with beautiful stores, good opera, the women were dressed elegantly. We experienced these things from the outside looking in. Like you would see a drifter today on the streets, I think of him often. He looks into a bakery shop and sees all those things and can't have any. I do think back on those times. When you see a hobo, you walk around him, he's like that outcast, you don't see him not even, you just see through him. We weren't bad off like that, we had housing, the community paid our rent.

gg: What kind of housing did you have?

ag: Rented rooms in an apartment house. That's very common in Italy because they have very big homes. The guy had five or six rooms he rented out and actually made a living on it, that was his income. The Jewish community assigned us rooms.

The Jewish community wasn't bad to us but when you are on the receiving line, you are hostile, you don't take it graciously, you always want more

and you don't want to have to say thank you. You don't really behave right.

You know there are professional schnorrers in between the Jews. A schnorrer is a begger and they are professionals. In Europe it was that the schnorrer had his route and he went from one town to another. You know already. "Oh my God, it's September already, that schnorer is here." You gave him food, especially in small towns, he stayed with the Jewish family and then he went on again. And he never said thank you. He said, "You should say thank you to me for accepting it"; that he's giving you the priviledge of doing a good deed. So you are saying thank you to him. Their traditions and living and how they managed is very interesting.

For example, when a daughter got married (among the schnorrers), the son-in-law in the dowry got a part of the father's territory. And they never interfered with each other's territories, there were strict boundaries. It was more like they were bringing news from other towns and everyone was looking forward to the begger coming.

He was a religious man, he ate only kosher and so forth. Like minstrals maybe? Not like a vagabond because he had a place where he had a home and family like everyone else. On the big holidays he always came back home. His profession was a begger. I was always so amazed by these people. Through their travel they were much more enlightened then the people living in these small towns. There was no communication between one small town and another. One small town would have maybe only one Jewish family and the rest would be Christians and so on. It was the only way of communication and knowing what was going on in the rest of the world. No radio, no television, not even a newspaper. I remember my mother saying, "Oh, he's here already, I didn't know time goes by so fast." And then they go also as shotchen, match-maker, that was a very important function with the Jewish families so spread out.

In Genova we were treated as foreigners. As foreigners you don't speak the language, you don't have any way of communication. The Italian Jews are Ladinos so they spoke Spanish while where we came from, we spoke Yiddish, so we didn't have way of communicating. Jews can only communicate through another language. That was quite difficult for us. So once you don't have the communication, contact is very hard, and also different habits and different things. And you're one of the transients and you don't want to get involved in the community because you don't know what's happening to you.

When the war with France came out, then the government realized that we are foreigners and they decided to treat us as immigrants but were "free internees of war." It's a very good status. In sending letters instead of putting a stamp on letters, we didn't have to pay stamps, we would write "free internees of war." We were not political internees because we weren't politically involved but they wanted to send us away not for our protection but for their military protection. So they send us to southern Italy.

gg: For their military protection? What do you mean?

ag: In case there were spies, sabotages, etc. But we did spend a few months in Genova during terrible times of the war. There were bombardments every night. Lots of deaths. Where we lived it was close to a railroad station so we spent most of our nights down in those cellars, everybody has a place assigned.

One morning we came out, and where we lived the one half of the building was just not there. We couldn't go back and we went to somebody else's house. The immigrants were helping each other. We tried to go together, our family, anywhere we went, the three of us, because of the fear that we won't come back anymore and we don't want to lose each other--the fear of separation and worry.

One terrible thing. Genova has lots of underpasses, tunnels for walking from one side to another. There was a bombing raid and the people went to hide in the tunnels and one bomb fell on one end of the tunnel and one bomb on the other side and I don't know how many thousands of people died right there. And people were running around like crazy looking for their people.

Papa had to go away to straighten something out. The government sent the men first out of Genova and I and my mother stayed there. It was very good that my mother was with me. She still was more experienced of worldly ways. I was so young and she had so much experience in her life. Belo was sent to southern Italy with a whole transport of men. We women didn't know what was going to happen. You don't know what will happen with you. There is no one there to tell you. You know how officials are. What will happen? "Don't worry, we'll let you know."

All the men were sent to Campagna, Eboli -- that was the outskirts, Campagna was a military camp out of Eboli. Campagna was a town with military barracks. Eboli is the county. Papa and the men were sent there on trains and buses. Later he wrote to us letters through the post office.

And then we started to run to the police every day, what will happen to us, where are we going? Some women were leaving, little by little. But we weren't sent on a big transport like the men did. We were separated from the men. They put the men altogether in camps and the women they sent in private homes in various town in southern Italy.

POTENZA

They sent us to Potenza and then from there, the county seat, it was up to the police where to send you or whether to keep you in that city, or in small towns. And you know what it depended on? If you were young you stayed in the city. If you were old and decrepit you were sent to the towns. If you were pretty they kept you in the city, if you were old and unpleasant they sent you to the small towns. And I was the lucky one and they kept us in the city. And of course my mother stayed with me, they wouldn't separate us. There were lots of mothers and daughters there.

That was paradise what after we went through. There was no bombardment, no war, they didn't know even what war is. It was really beautiful.

I want to tell you what papa was doing in the camp. He opened a kitchen, he was cooking. There were hundreds of people there and he was cooking. There was food provided in mess hall which was not edible plus they got some subsidy of money. Some men got together and pooled their subsidy and sometimes to eat in the mess hall and some to have someone cook for them. They made in the courtyard a little stove out of tin cans and he was cooking. He made the kneadle and all these Czech foods. Where he learned it, I don't know. We were sending him recipes. He made potato soup and all these things. He was making extra money that way. When you do something for somebody, there's left over for you too.

Then the Carabinieri hired him to be their cook. Even Italians have terrible food in the mess halls. The Carabinieri needed a cook. The Carabinieri are the para-military branch type of police. Anyways he was cooking for them and they loved him. He was a big shot, he was somebody. When you have some function, you have some contact with the authorities, that gives you a status and people knew him.

Meanwhile I lived in Potenza and we had money subsidy and our rent paid in private homes. I lived with my mother in one room with the privilege of the kitchen. Mostly World War I war widows got the privilege to rent out these rooms so they could make extra money from the government. The government assigned us to places like that.

We lived by Mrs. Trillo and she had two sons in the war already. Her housing was a government housing project. So we had a nice room and that's where I learned Italian with this family. She had two daughters living at home and two sons at home besides the ones in the army. It was a big family and by the Italians it doesn't matter, they always have extra room to rent because they sleep together in one room. They were very nice to us. I spent the evening with them and talked to them and they taught me Italian.

Then as papa was away in camp, I got conjugal visits - that's Italians for you - "a married man needs a wife, otherwise he'll get bad ideas!" I had to put in a request and he put in requests for it, lots of red tape in between that. He couldn't get out of the camp but I could go and visit him.

I took the train from Potenza -- that traveling day they didn't count -- coming and going wasn't counted as a day of visitation. They gave you three days of visitation. In between was a Sunday and it came out to a whole week! They give you all the papers. In the trains they always come and check your papers. You need permission to go. When I came in, they called papa and told him your wife is coming and it was a big hurrah. He went to the hotel and went to the room and he got all these days free. You see, we had to everyday go to the police and sign in. It was the Apel. It's like in the military where they call out your name if you are there, also in schools. He didn't have to report on the days I was there. We both had a vacation. We had a hotel room by ourselves.

They didn't have to be afraid of us running away because he didn't have any papers and without papers you are a fugitive and you have to be in hiding all the time. Every station somebody comes and asks for your papers. Papers were a very important thing in Italy, in Europe itself. It's hard to understand for Americans. Mexicans understand it when they came here that they need papers. You never went anywhere without your identification because you could be stopped at any time, any place.

I think I went three times on these visitations and then we asked for him to be transferred to Potenza. He had to go to another city, Solerno? to a doctor to sign a statement that for his health, he has to come to Potenza. We were 11 months married at that time. The doctor said, "Oh my God, you're 11 months married and you're not together?" You know, that's considered a sacrilege to Italian men so he was given permission to transfer.

In Italy there was a big camp, Faramonte, which was a camp of families. They tried to get the people together from the small towns, the women and the men from the camps. That was very south and it was camp living. Families had individual barracks but it was very much a military camp living and we had it much better being individuals in the city. We could go for walks, in stores, etc. We lived in the city where in Faramonte you lived in a camp. So we were trying to fight going to Faramonte and tried to get papa to come to Potenza. As the police chief was very nice to me, and papa had all these connections because he had cooked for them and had connections, he was able to come and live with us in Potenza. There we lived for four years.

Things were turning out good for us. Everything came to happen in a good way. We could have gone to Faramonte but we stayed there, we could have gone somewhere else, but we came to Potenza. Things turned out good.

gg: Did you feel that way at the time?

ag: Oh yes. We were very happy living in Potenza. I was very happy to live in Italy just as such. My saddest moment of my life was leaving Italy.

gg: How did your mother feel about living there?

ag: She liked it. She never wanted to go to the United States. She was trying her utmost not to bring us to the United States. She lived in the United States and she knows the sweatshops and the terrible poverty, the haves and have-nots, the people going every morning into the garbage cans and pulling out the almost fresh bread. People were throwing out fresh bread and other people were pulling it out from the garbage. She had a good position in the U.S. and she learned a different way of life that made her life so much more interesting because she had different backgrounds. But she thought it wouldn't be the best place for us to live because she remembered the pre-first world war United States. So that we left to come to United States as a last resort after the war. When we had to decide we were leaving Italy.

gg: Why did you have to decide to leave Italy?

ag: We could have gotten citizenship to live in Italy. But Italy after the war was so torn up, it was such a hard place to live and we were afraid of another war. And they said that war is not over, there will be another war very soon. And where the war will be, will be again in Europe. Let's go out of Europe. That was the talk of everybody - Europe has had it. Europe is finished, Europe is only a battlefield and will always be a battlefield. So we tried to go to Israel, again. Everybody tried to go. And we tried to go to America saying we would put in our documents and whichever comes first, we'll go. The papers for United States came sooner than for Israel. So we decided to come to the United States.

gg: Was it hard to get into Israel after Statehood?

ag: Very hard. Still you had to have papers, transportation, a boat; it was very difficult. For people who came from Europe it was easier, there were already organizations helping people to go there. But we were out of there. We were liberated many years before they were liberated. We were liberated in 1944. They were liberated in 1948. So our status was different. They came straight from concentration camps and they had the privilege to go before us, naturally. You know how situations go, fate. Fate?

Oh, I hated to leave Italy. It was such a nice place. I just loved the Italian people. Warm hearted, understanding. Being poor they understood what poverty is, of not having, of being hungry, they help each other. They help a stranger more than their own people. They are very compassionate people. Very loud and gregarious and big talkers.

Big talkers are warm people. They don't hold in themselves, everything comes out. They always say, "favorite" which means help yourself. They want to share with you. They don't have what to share but it's their manners. It's the right manners. When you pass somebody and he's eating, the first thing he'll say is "Favorite". And he gets offended if you don't take from him, that crumb of bread he has. Because that's the good manners. When you go on the train, everybody brings their food and so they open the baskets. Now you have to eat with him and you don't want to but you have to. You have to take from him and give from yours if you have. But sometimes you don't have. I don't know, it's very interesting.

Of course then he can come and stab you the same time but that's not the point. He stabs you a nice way, he cheats you a nice way. He'll give you information that is in his favor but he'll smile and kiss your hand. It's something about these people that is very endearing.

Potenza: When papa came there we stayed living with Mrs. Trillo. I lived there with my mother so we added another bed. I had the conjugal double bed and my mother had a cot. We lived there in that room where we ate and slept and did everything.

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Every day we had to go to the police to register and that was like a meeting place for all the immigrants. It was someplace to go, you got dressed up. Twice a day we had to report, 11 in the morning and 6 in the evening and we had curfew to be home at a certain hour. But that's alright, it was dark out, no lights, what would we do out there anyhow? That was before the bombardments. Maybe there was a street light every third corner. Don't forget electricity is a luxury which only Americans can afford not to turn off the lights.

I started to do sewing. Papa started to clean, pressing suits and spot cleaning. There was no one to do that there, I don't know how we found out how to do it. We bought books. We were boiling certain roots, and that water he brushed the suit with, and then he pressed it and the suit looked very fresh and well pressed. And I was sewing. I learned how to sew by sewing for other people. That was all done in one room.

gg: I thought you learned sewing in Czechoslovakia?

ag: Yes, in Czechoslovakia before we left my mother sent me to a dressmaker to teach me how to sew in a few months. I knew the techniques of using a sewing machine but I didn't know how to construct a garment. But my mother, with her American know-how, we opened our own blouse, took it apart, pressed it out and that was my pattern for blouses. And a pattern for skirts, the same way. We used our clothes, opened them and with another pleat here and another pleat there, it's a new garment for somebody. And that way I learned, just experimenting on my clothes to make it over for somebody else. Really that's all I knew. And being a foreigner, people wanted clothes from somebody new. I was important as a foreigner even if I didn't know how, I had the name. That was impressive. Well, I went to the Italians to have a dress made for me because I liked her work much better than what I did.

But everything is appearances, everything is the impression you give. Everybody wants to have a show, the whole life is show - all is impression. "Oh, you're a foreigner, do you do sewing? Oh could you do me a dress?" And I got very nice clientele, ladies who had better financial situations, naturally. So you didn't make a dress in three hours, it took a week to make a dress for somebody. But it was compensated and with the subsidy that we had, and my mother helping me and papa doing other little things like cleaning, we managed to survive. We managed to survive very nicely so that we were better off than other people. But then our needs were very limited also. We didn't have meat, or chicken, that was only for holidays.

gg: Was that because it wasn't available or because you didn't have the money?

ag: We didn't have the money for it. Because the subsidy we got from the government was not enough to live on, that kind of thing, like welfare here. And we didn't have any clothes, so we had to acquire something to wear. I was sewing for myself but still you know? There wasn't a dress store that you go in and buy something. You make everything. Maybe today in Potenza there are stores but not in my times. Where did I get my shoes? I don't remember. Zocolos, those wooden

shoes, from the shoe maker. They were just a piece of wood with two strips of leather on it.

Later, mothers came to ask me if their daughters could come to learn to sew by me - and they paid me for it.

ag: Didn't all the girls know how to sew?

ag: Yes, but dressmaking is one thing, embroidery is another thing. And also I was doing knitting. I made patterns and I had women who were doing knitting for me, like somebody did the sleeves and somebody else did the backs and fronts and we were putting them together, my mother was doing that. I was designing them and in touch with the women. Lots of the women in immigration, the Germans and so on were helping us. I gave them work to do too but the Italian women were much faster knitters.

Italian women are very fast craft-wise, good workers if they want to. I liked their work much better than the European women. Just that you couldn't depend on them. They always said "domani" (tomorrow) and then I went two weeks later for it and it still was not done. You knew you had to take that into account. For Westerners it's very hard to take, that "domani". You promise domani also and they know it won't get done domani and it's a whole circle. There are a string of five people each with a domani and the first person knew he wouldn't get his until the last "domani" is done.

Papa got quite acquainted with the police, the police chief, and I got friendly with the Italians. Not the local people, but Northerners who came there to work like a mid-wife. We knew two mid-wives. The mid-wives are government employees and they came from eastern Italy and they were just like foreigners in southern Italy. They were both single women and one had a boyfriend and the other had a boyfriend. But the boyfriends were all married.

You see you don't have a boyfriend who is single because then you get married. So you have a married boyfriend and that was common. So you get socially with these women together because they were looking for social contacts. They couldn't make contact with the local people for that what they are. Having a boyfriend is a bad thing so only a more modern person, or not a person from that town could accept that. They were accepted as mid-wives, that was no problem. Just not socially.

So we were very friendly with dinners and so on. We hardly knew their boyfriends, they met only for one reason. The boyfriends came in the evening, slept with them. One was a very high official in fascist party, he lived in the same house where we lived. But I knew of him and knew he was Pia's boyfriend, but he had no other contact. But that was later, I'm rushing.

gg: You said mothers asked you to teach their daughters to sew, did you do that?

ag: I didn't have too much space but then later on. That was in 1942, then later they paid me for it and it was working out; I had two girls as

apprentices at one time. You know, there are so many little things you can make a living with. A little there, a little here, and so on. And then we got acquainted with the baker. To get eggs, we'd go out and waited when the people from the country were coming and we were buying eggs from them. You bought a chicken and made a big pot and invited everyone, especially for Pesach.

By the same landlady was a German family living which we are still in touch with. We lived for many years with them together. They were a husband and wife and mother, the same set-up as we were. They were from Berlin, very well to do. Their customs and way of living were so different from ours. They were a little bit older than we were, the whole nucleus was older and they had grown children which they sent to England when they were coming to Italy. They had two sons there. But we were close and did things together. We were invited for tea.

I was close to the landlady because I was younger and my mother was more outgoing and she was friendlier with the landlady than they were. They lived for themselves completely and never came sitting in the front room to the landlady.

The social activities went around the braziero, the heating unit. You come in the evening and everyone sits around that. And that was the social gathering place. Everyone comes, takes a chair, put your feet on it. Neighbor would come, etc. So that's what we did. She loved Belo, that landlady. She was blind and she just loved him. As a good Italian custom, it came Sunday and the blind lady would bring a big plate of pasta only for Belo. He's the man of the house, it was only for him. So he thanked her and helped her out again, and then we shared it, naturally. But I just want to tell - never mind the women can watch but the man has to eat, he needs strength! He plays the man!

She was a very nice lady. She was blind since one of her children was born or something and she raised them all. She was sitting in one place in that room and she was commanding that whole household. When the girls had to go buy something, groceries, she felt the money and gave it to them. When they came back, they had to give her the change. She'd say, "there's a penny missing". She didn't know how to write or read but she knew how to figure money and everything else.

When we were cooking pasta and wanted to know if it's a pound or whatever, we went to her, I brought a whole bag and said I need a pound of pasta, she went, grabbed a pound and said "here you are." And you could be sure that it was right. Or we needed flour, or rice, always to her to measure. We had coals, we were cooking with coals. Everyone had his hole where he cooked and underneath was a space for coals. You kept your coal there. The Ephraimsons had and Mrs. Trillo had. And she always was stealing coals from us, one piece. Here she brought a big plate of pasta but she went and stole a piece of coal. We knew already she stole a coal because she was all black.

gg: Was coal expensive, was that a hard thing to come by?

ag: Well if you don't have money, everything is hard to come by. We're still talking before the shooting war. They really gave us the real understanding of the Italian people. She sacrificed her whole family to be able to have two rooms rented. They had two rooms and a living/family room and a very small cubby hall like a closet. I think the girls were sleeping in the closet. I never could figure out where they slept. Because in the morning when you got up, they were all up. Mrs. Trillo was living in the main room with the boys because she seperated the boys from the girls. But they seemed very happy and they were very nice.

They were always dressed very nicely and they had good figures, the girls. But what it is, they have one dress for Sunday and one dress for everyday. And that Sunday dress next year becomes the everyday dress and the everyday dress becomes the dress you scrub floors in. So they were always dressed nicely, they made their own dresses but just one dress. It was not a need of more dresses because if your neighbor doesn't have it, you don't need it, right? So you don't feel deprived. And the girls, wherever they went was always to church.

Church is the place to go, like we go to the movies. She went to the church. She knew she had to be there a certain hour, she just crossed herself, and looked around at the boys or whoever there was and then she went home. But that was the only place she could go unattended. It was a justified place to go. They lived a very normal, nice living.

Mrs. Trillo had two boys in the army and one was already on the Russian front and her prayers were that her son should be captured by the Americans. That was the only prayers they had, that they should be prisoners of the Americans. And one got to be a prisoner by the Americans. The other was with the German army. Also politically, everyone in the family belongs to different political party so depending who wins, there is somebody from the family there, it's an in with whoever wins.

I got quite friendly with the older son, that was already after we left her. He was a very intelligent man. When you were born we didn't live there anymore, but I took her to you and she was feeling the nose, and every little thing of your body. She took off your clothes, she wanted to feel you. This way she knew how you looked like. We went often to say hello to them. That was Mrs Trillo.

Then the war was getting worse. Our social life was with the rest of the immigrants mostly. 1943? Listen to what the police did. They called everybody up on the Piazza, and told us that the Germans are retreating from North Africa and will be coming through Potenza and wanted we should save our lives and go to small towns.

They gave us a list of small towns where we could go to and we could choose. And in two days they would give us trucks, we would take our belongings and take us to these places. Men who had bigger families, could go there on his own with regular transportation and find housing and come back to Potenza and Italian military trucks picked us up and took us to these small towns.

CORLETTO PERTICARA

And we came to Corletto Perticara. This was about an hour bus ride from Potenza. There is nothing there - that book Torregruca talks about it exactly. And there we stayed until the Germans were retreating and the English started bombing and Corletto was bombed. We were under bombardment every day. It was a very small town of peasants. We went together with the same people that lived in Mrs. Trillo's house, that German couple. They kind of hung themselves onto us because we were more enterprising and we spoke Italian and they didn't. They never learned Italian although she did some.

They were the real typical Germans, prim and proper. Four o'clock you had tea even when you didn't have what to put in the water. I remember they invited us always over to tea to their place. That was next door. They had one egg they divided and made like twelve sandwiches out of it. And with one slice of bread, they made four sandwiches. Like that. They were very polite passing it on and "no thank you darling, I don't want any." Very funny people.

So when we came to Corletto, we moved there together and they had their room and we had our room. And the landlady was a woman who had an American husband. They called her the Americana because her husband moved to America and made money and sent money home to built a house. His two daughters were living there and his wife. They lived in the basement of the house and we lived on the upper part. We really didn't have any contact with them because it was completely divided. But the Italians in that part of the country feel much happier to live in the basement, for a very good reason. It's cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter. And they have everything there, the water, the kitchen, everything they need for living quarters in the basement. We made our upstairs pretty comfortable. But we weren't there for long before the bombardments started.

First it was the English bombing and it was a very beautiful sight to see. They were throwing the flares and the whole town lit up. Everybody ran to the porches, everybody ran looking how beautiful the city was. But a day or two before that we were sitting on our porch and we heard bombers passing by and we noticed that they were foreign, not Italian bombers, and they were roaring very hard. We said, well they wouldn't throw bombs here, there's not even a car or bus, only donkeys. What would be the use to throw bombs? And then on the way out they threw some bombs, we saw them throwing bombs, it didn't effect the town though. Oh, we thought they were too heavy and running short on gasoline, you know all these discussion people have as to why they threw the bombs without any reasons. The Americans are so smart, they know must what they're doing, we thought.

But what it was, they were bombing a dry river which they maybe took for a road because there were no roads. So they assumed the dry river was a road. I don't know if the Americans didn't have maps or something. They left. Everybody went out to wave good-bye to them as they left. But a night or two after came more flares, no bombs, and left. Then a day or two later they started bombing regularly. Two o'clock the English and

6:00 the Americans. On time. Each were different. The English, when they came, they were selective where they threw the bombs. The Americans were "just throw em, one of them will hit it." They didn't aim.

Well, one of these times it was very bad and so we run into a little forest out of the town but we couldn't go too far. And we came to that forest and it was bombing the whole night through. In the morning we noticed that that forest on both sides had river beds. It was the worst possible place to be. Then we went back to the town but the whole town was destroyed. So we took a few of our belongings and we went out of the town. Everybody running. The Italians had where to run because they had their fields outside of the town and they had there their little cottages where they stayed during harvest season. There they had ovens to cook and bake.

Through all the wars they went through in their history, they always preserved food for themselves. They made double walls in their houses in town so that they could store grain and food there. But they never had bombing before and the bombs opened all these things. These double walls were protection from looting but not for bombing. So then there was lots of looting going on. Not too many people were killed because everyone had run from the town.

So we went out in the mountains and one amazing thing...my mother had angina in Potenza yet and was not allowed to walk or have any stress and not to do any heavy work because she had heart troubles. When we came to Corletto she continued her pattern and always had glycerin pills. When we had to run from town to the mountains we walked about nine hours non-stop and my mother didn't have even one attack.

All the time that we were in the mountains, four or five weeks, she never felt bad. We were sure she wouldn't make it, our only fear, we didn't want to run away from town, because we thought it would be too much on my mother. But the will of survival is so strong that she just overcame it. Naturally when things got better and she came back, she had to be careful again. It's not that she got cured, but the will of survival. We were always talking about it. We told the doctors how surprised we were. They didn't have answers, you know, they don't philosophize about things like that.

As we came out to the mountain, as we were running and walking, a peasant woman comes with her breads on her head and she says "poor strangers, where are you running to?" So we said we heard that there was a place with nice fields and a shepherd's shack that is abandoned. We were about 10 or 12 people. She said, "Oh my god, you don't have any food with you." She went and took off one of the two large breads from her head and then opened a little bundle that had salt in it. At that time salt was worth more than gold. She gave us salt, one of her handkerchiefs of salt and that bread. We never saw that woman before and never after. She never expected any payment for it, because money didn't mean anything. Money had no value. All the savings that people had didn't mean a thing. You were bartering, money couldn't buy anything.

That typifies, that peasant woman, typifies that attitude of the Italians: "Poor strangers, where are you running, you don't have anyone to go to." And that was true through all the war years where the Italians were helping us more than they were helping their own people. Because they said, "Our cousins, everyone, we all have families, but you don't have anybody to turn to." So when there were rations - on everything you could think of - we always got more than the rations allowed. So that means that baker was short changing somebody else but she felt we needed it more than that somebody else because they all have fields and things.

In Potenza it was the same thing. We always found food because the people were helping us. They never denied us anything that they had. But the thing was that they didn't have. The bread was so terribly bad, I don't know what it was made of. They were mixing corn and oatmeal that we would discard, it was very dry and not chewable but it was something. For that reason we put water on it. If you had a little oil, you put oil on it and you ate it. That was the staple.

But when we came out there to the field, the weather was nice and we slept outside. Every family had their own little tree to cuddle around and we slept out there nights. Papa went back to town and found grain. When the bombing stopped, the people of the town took it over and gave out rations. So papa brought back flour and we found peasants which gave us fruit we bartered for. And papa baked bread.

You should see, we were all city people; from Vienna, Berlin, etc. who never knew bread was even baked, they think it comes from heaven or wherever. They had the outside round oven, the peasants lived out there and used the oven for baking bread, so papa put the wood in and pre-heated it, swept it out, everybody was standing around watching the bread baking. It was the biggest occasion you could think of. An event, a happening!

gg: How did you get yeast?

ag: The farmers gave us starters. They all gave us things. In hard times like that, there's lots of sharing going on. But it was always that we didn't have what to share with them. So we gave clothing but we didn't have too much to start out with, then we took the minimum when we left.

Blankets were more important for us to take than clothing. So you had clothing on you, maybe some underwear and that's it. I really don't know how we made it now that I'm thinking about it.

In the evenings we were all sitting on top of that mountain and we could see down there, beautiful views. We enjoyed it, we hated to go back.

Then the English came. Then we went down to town. The Canadians were the first ones who came to that town. All the homes were destroyed completely. The walls were standing, you could see the light of the stars. It was such a beautiful site. It was amazing to us. The Canadian soldiers came with their trucks and you couldn't walk, the

houses were just crumbling into the streets. They came and with one bulldozer just moved it away and made a street to walk on. You know, for an Italian who never saw a truck before in his life, and with this big bulldozer and making all that work that would have taken two years for the people to do by hand they did in two hours, the whole thing was cleaned up.

Then the good times started for us. My mother spoke English from when she was living in the United States. She always thought she forgot her English. And oh, she was desperate, she understood every word they told her and she couldn't answer. But then after a few days, her ear got it back and she started to talk to them. We invited them to our house.

gg: What kind of house did you have then?

ag: Well, we still had walls. Then we moved into the basement because the landlady moved out into her shack she had in the mountains and she didn't come back. We moved into the basement and lived in two beds. In one bed was the two old ladies, my mother and the old lady of the Ephraimsons and the other bed were the two couples, us and the Empraimsons. Four of us in the one bed, a big bed. We transferred everything into the basement because there was a roof. But during the day we were upstairs in the upper floor.

Then we got acquainted with the soldiers so they brought their motorcycles in, put on their lights, and well, we had light. They beamed their motorcycle lights on the ceiling. They brought their canned goods and we opened it and warmed it up for them and made it like a meal and they felt very much at home. We got quite friendly with some. Some soldiers get adopted to you, they came every evening. They tried to get some lamb or something from the butcher. Because they gave them cigarettes and cigarettes was everything. Under his jacket he came with the piece of lamb. We got him cigarettes from the Canadians. We didn't smoke, well I smoked at that time.

You know how we made cigarettes during the war? Out of mint leaves. We dried it, rolled it, and made tobacco. Newspaper, the white part is very good. It didn't have all the chemicals like newspapers have today. That's what we rolled it in. Soon as the Canadians came we really survived well. With one of the soldiers we got really friendly and we wrote to him all the time. We wrote to him when we got to the United States but we never heard from him then. Once we went to Canada and wrote to him that we were coming to Canada for a visit and would like to meet him someplace. We didn't get an answer, we wondered, maybe he never returned home, or whatever.

Then the trading and the bartering started. People were complaining about us that good smells were coming from our house. Because we had lots of canned goods and English teas and we were preparing and doing for them. We got some chicken once in a while someplace and made them a meal. My mother, her English made them feel at home, that they could talk to somebody and complain to somebody.

Then, later an English colonel came to town looking over what's happening, he was one of the big brass. He was from the intelligence service. He spoke German and Italian and English, naturally. Colonel Ernest Howell. He was English! Britisher than British. Very dry. He was so good to us, but very British.

When he came to town, you know how the children run around, they brought him to our house because we are now the Americans to them. He came with his chauffeur which was an American soldier from Brooklyn. That time I was pregnant with you already. Soon as the Canadian soldiers came, I got pregnant -- for celebration -- we were liberated, right? 1943 going on 1944, about that time. When Howell came, we invited him in, made tea for him, made him sit down on seats, the wooden crates, there was nothing there. But it didn't matter. Nobody had. It was war. Even not having, you tried to make it a little bit livable and neat. We spoke to him. Lucy was the wife of the German couple, the Emphraisons. And she knew some English from school. So we entertained them, talked to them.

He asked us if we wanted to go back to Potenza. We said sure but there is no such thing like transportation. No way of getting back, all the bridges were destroyed, everything was destroyed. But the soldiers made ways, you go down to the river and up in the jeeps. They made a walk, not bridges because they were all river banks. There wasn't actually too much water there. But you had to get off the truck, walk and the truck came where you met it on the other side. Everybody had to get off.

He said "I'm sending a truck for you with a Jewish chauffeur who speaks Yiddish and German and you are coming. And when you arrive in Potenza, I will have housing for you." He really got a liking to papa. Papa could talk well and was a vivacious talker in Italian. Howell was a very straight cold person and papa was a very outgoing person. I don't know how they got along so well but they were friends for many years.

Well, we didn't believe it. He left and that's it. A week later, we are called to the police station in Corletto that there's a message for us that in two days the truck will be here. (You know, that's the only communication that there was.) We packed up our 2½ belongings and the truck came -- a big military truck came with orders of especially taking care of me. I'm pregnant and he has to take care of me. I'm not allowed to walk, I'm to be carried! So anyhow, we rode like kings.

When we were living in Corletto Perticara papa was getting a request from the police chief in Potenza through the Carabinieri in Corletto that papa should come to Potenza. Because you had to have papers, you just couldn't travel during the war anyplace, and especially us. Papa knew already that if it was a request that meant they needed oil and food which from the small towns you could get.

This was when the British were already in Italy. There were big shortages of food. Oil is a big thing and of course grain is the sustenance. So the police chief sent requests to the police in Corletto that papa should go to Potenza -- it was an official thing. The Carabinieri thought, who knows who he is. First they thought he did something wrong but we knew, papa knew what the police chief wanted --

oil. So papa put in a suitcase oil, some grain and food and made another suitcase for himself. Usually when you came on the buses, for everybody there were the carabinieri waiting for you and searching your suitcases so you shouldn't have contraband. But the police chief sent his people to pick up papa's suitcases and he went to the police chief gave him the suitcase with the food, took his own personal belonging back and sold them. That's how they cooperated with each other. He had a glass of wine with the police chief, talked about political things, what's happening and not happening. Then he went back to Corletto. This happened every two, three weeks.

The Carabinieri were respecting papa because they felt he had some connections but didn't know what it was. Papa brought back some things like sugar and other things we needed and couldn't get in a small town.

Another story of what we did in Corletto. Being in a small town without having much to do, we met there another person. He was from Turkey, also an immigrant like us. He was a furrier and someone else was a furrier and so we decided to make fur coats. They had lambs which were still born or very young lambs which meant their coats were very nice and shiny. We made connection with butchers who would give us the furs so we could select them in order that they should look all alike. We found out how to cure it or tan it. I was making the patterns and linings. The other guys were the furriers. We were making fur coats.

The fur coats looked beautiful but had a certain smell. But when papa brought the fur coats into Potenza, they were such a hit. People were starved for clothing. He sold it like hot cakes. The police chief got one for a better price, and here and there. The main thing was that it kept us occupied. It gave us a project to find the furs and to do it. In need you do find projects to do and make somehow a dollar, somewhere. I never wanted to have a fur coat. Papa said, "Why don't you have one?" I said, I don't want to smell. I never had one, not even a jacket.

Later in Potenza, we made coats. We bought the military blankets and were dyeing them brown and black.

gg: You could buy military blankets?

ag: You could buy everything on the black market. The whole care package. Even the nice diapers. Out of the diapers that they were bringing out on the market we made table clothes, they were nice and white and very soft fabric. We crochet them together and from one diaper we could make four napkins and crocheted around it. We made table clothes and napkins. It was very nice. You don't use such nice things for diapers, only the Americans do. You could find anything on the black market.

Our coats we made out of the wool blankets and made matching hats. At that time they wore those little tiny hats on the forehead, covering one eye -- silly looking things. Then out of parachute fabric, we were dyeing it and making dresses. At that time it was not like now where you can get plenty of that. I still don't remember what we did about shoes.

When we came to Corletto, there was no water in the house and we had to get water from the fountain. The women carried the water in a long shaped barrel, on their head. Papa went, took one thing like that, put it under his arm and went to get water. The women came to my house screaming at me, threatening me, never again to send my husband for water because that's not a man's job and if I cannot do it myself, I should send somebody else, but never to send my husband. He's a precious person, he could strain his arms or something! Well, we didn't do that again. I hired somebody to bring me the water.

When we were washing or doing anything -- you know they have this big, big bed sheets, so papa was helping me to put it on the line. He couldn't. The children started running after him and calling him "the man who washes" ("effeminato"). It's such a big difference in culture and the way the man is put on that pedestal. The women do ALL the work. They tend to the house, the children, they tend the fields, and the men stand on the Piazza and chew the fat. When they come home from the fields, they eat, get the best part of the food, and what's leftover is for the children and wife. Then he goes to the tavern, and again are with men together. If in they have a movie house in that town, you see only men, you don't see women. I'm not talking about industrial cities, but in small towns where the differentiation between men and women is very crass. The men don't associate with women at all.

Also going to the fields, he sits on the donkey. She walks behind the donkey, and when it comes to a steep hill, then she holds on to the donkey's tail and is kind of pulled up. But when she goes behind him she always does knitting and carries something on her head. You never see a woman not carrying something -- like a sewing machine or a big basket of whatever. But a heavy load she carries, and always knits, usually socks. When you pointed these things out to them, they couldn't understand it. It's so inbred. I don't know, it was so important for all these young women to get married, the girls to get married early and take over working. She got a dowry, a few olive trees; that's a very good income, good for many lifetimes. The more olive trees, the bigger the dowry. She works hard and always associates only with women. Then she's always dressed in black because she's always in mourning for somebody.

Widowhood is the hardest thing. They have to die with their husband. They are not allowed to be seen on the street. Not allowed to be seen alone, they have to go always with somebody. And they have to make a living to support the family but if they are not allowed to walk on the street, how can they do something? So they do washing for other people. But the fields that have to go unattended. They are to stay in the house. They are not allowed to be seen on the street -- I don't know for how many years. They are just like an outcast. It's not their fault that their husband died, but it's like it would be their fault, they are treated like outcasts. Then they have the children to take care of, and they have lots of children, naturally. I always felt very, very sorry for them. For that there was going on so much gossip in between them and talking about other women, because they didn't have any other entertainment. That was the only entertainment, to find something wrong on somebody else. They were quite vicious, like you call it the sharp tongue.

I got acquainted with a younger woman and I went during the harvest to the fields with them. They were already the richer ones, they had a nice house out on the fields. They spent weekends in the town and during the week they stayed by the fields. I went during the harvest time to the fields with them.

It was the first time I rode on a donkey -- oh my God! I rather walk. But it was long and I couldn't walk anymore. I didn't know which was worse off, my feet or my behind. But when I came to the fields, it was very nice, nice grapes and others things. All the cooking was done in the fireplace. They didn't have a stove but in the fireplace with big kettles. They had two, three kettles hanging there and they were cooking for the help that comes. The neighbors always come helping each other.

We ate two meals, ministrone or pasta and bread, and more bread. That was the staple for every peasant. They baked the bread very dry, big rounds, but not higher than 5 inches, mostly crust. They don't like the white of it, they like the crust. They cut it in big chunks. It's dry so you put it under water, make it wet and put some oil and oregano on it and that's a sandwich. Not bad. And cheese, homemade cheese. They lived from their own products. I think salt and sugar was the only thing that they bought and in the Italian diet, there's no sugar -- only for Christmas. Otherwise they don't bake really, especially the peasant.

The child for breakfast gets a piece of bread with oil on it and coffee and maybe milk. They made egg yolk with a little bit of sugar for breakfast for the small children and babies. It's nutritious.

They didn't have to worry about fashions, they always wore black. Maybe some brown in it.

gg: What happens to the girls that don't get married?

ag: Forget it, you're dead. All the men are married, there's not such thing as unmarried men. But a woman alone, a zitalone, is the worse curse that could happen. When a family doesn't have a married daughter, that's a big shame to the family. Then she goes as a nun. But for that you also have to have money. Nunneries don't take you without a dowry -- your dowry to Christ. It's the same dowry you would have taken to your husband. A man can go as a monk and not have anything, (not a priest for that you have to have schooling) and they are beggars. The monks wear brown.

And then also, if you had a child and it was very sick or something, you promised God that when he gets well he will be a monk. And when they are small, the child is running around in monk's clothes and he's dedicated to God. I would feel so sorry, the poor kid playing ball with all that. They are sacrificing their children. And there are a lot of child deaths. In their culture they don't mourn too long when a child dies because it's a step to heaven for the parents. They have to have one reason for why so many children are dying.

It's hard to remember. It's been so many years back and I've been through so many cultures. But I remember I felt pretty comfortable with them.

gg: How did they treat you? You must have appeared so odd to them.

ag: I was an odd thing. I wasn't the only one, there were more families. Maybe because I was younger than the rest of the families I mingled more with the younger women. The language barrier -- each town has its own dialect and you just don't understand it. You think you speak Italian but then it doesn't sound Italian to you at all! It's very hard to understand, it's just a different language.

I felt isolated but I had my mother and husband. The Ephraimsons were there which I looked up to as older people, they were more my mother's generation. There were other people. We took long walks, did things, talk about when the good times will come, when the war will be over. War talk all the time, war talk. Always some news came, always somebody brought some news. You know how news travels; it's always embellished or made worse and we never knew what was the truth, but still.

And then in between us there were Italian prisoners of war which were political prisoners. One gentleman from Torino kind of attached himself to us. We spent time with him and learned very much about northern Italy from him. He had a very unpleasant incident. He was eating his dinner in his room and a bomb fell on his bed. He was sitting on the bed next to the table. It fell on the bed and didn't explode because it was cushioned. He closed the door, came to us and said "That's it, I'm not going back." He didn't go back not even for his clothes. Probably with time it exploded because there was more bombing going on, but I remember that face when he walked in. He was an older person, in his 50's.

gg: The political prisoners were also sent out to the villages?

ag: Yes, it depends how political. In fascist times there's lots of political prisoners. He was more considered as being not dependable politically and as the war was on, they sent him away from the big city. Once you come to a town like that, you can't send a message, there's no telephone, no telegram. Post office, yes, but the letters come too late. The war could be over by the time a letter came. It really is not bad living...for a vacation. You don't have lights, you live by daylight. When I was in Mexico, I found it the same way, you live by daylight. We had books, you borrowed from each other, everyone had something. I don't know how. We read Italian, we read much sooner than we spoke and that was good.

I don't have bad memories of that part. My whole stay in Italy with all the bombs and with all the hunger and deprivation, I cannot have bad memories because people were very humane. Like in Corletto, people were helping us. When we stood in line, they helped us to stay in the line. And when I sent your father to stand in line, he was pushed to the first, he was the only man in line anyhow. They did respect us, they knew we were strangers, they called us "strangieri", that was our name. So whatever you did, it was strange to them anyways, our way of life and

cooking and doing --it was all strange. I didn't have to worry about clothing or styles. It was good times, we had our fun. We didn't go to their dances when there was a fiesta. But not even they had too much, they were a pretty sad people. We weren't invited, we didn't mingle with the local people, maybe a school teacher spoke to you. School teachers were always non-married. I don't know why. I know in the United States there was a law that you couldn't get married if you were a teacher. Good old days! But in Italy it was the same thing. You always new the school teacher was a zitalone.

We came to Potenza where Howell found us a very nice apartment. Found? -- He confiscated an apartment, there's no such thing like finding. He took over an apartment and there we stayed in a nice modern apartment. That was it. We stayed there, set up housekeeping. The Emphraimsons went with us but they moved someplace else. I don't remember where. And then they didn't stay too long after in Potenza. They moved on. They were wealthy, had money in Switzerland.

War was gong on north of us but we were liberated. In Naples war was going on but we were living in Potenza. They were pushing the Germans and the Germans were running and the allies were following them. So the more south you were, sooner you were liberated. We were liberated and others were still in concentration camps and were still being sent to concentration camps. Again, we were very lucky.

gg: Did you know what was going on in other parts of Europe?

ag: Not really. I still have letters from my Aunt and Uncle saying "we are going to a working camp" and telling us where they have their belongings and that when they come back they would let us know what happened to them. They said good-bye but in a way that they were just leaving Kremnica, that's all. They never thought that they would not come back. Even in the letter she says, "We didn't do harm to anybody, we are residents, we were born here, our grandparents were born here, I don't see any reasons why we cannot stay." That was going on. Saying, "We are honest people, we never cheated, we didn't do any harm, why should they do harm to us?" That was in all her letters.

We knew. We feared that we knew, but it was not spoken. When a letter like that came and said good-bye, that they are going in a working camp, we had a feeling that they won't come back anymore but we didn't want to, we did not want to know that it was really happening. We didn't want to accept it, that something like that could happen. It was beyond our imagination. We just couldn't imagine it. It's very hard to imagine something like that could happen.

The southern part of Italy was liberated first. The big fighting started around Rome. Below Rome it lasted about a year. Thousands of American soldiers died there. When you were born in summer 1944, then we moved to another apartment, also we got it through Howell, a very nice apartment.

Papa was traveling to other towns. He was employed by the military as military assistant to Howell because he knew all the connections; which

policeman to talk to, he knew his ways around Potenza and the surrounding areas. So that is what they utilized him for. He travelled with Howell and then by himself. Howell sent him places with a driver. He was getting paid and that was our living plus food rations. That was well paid.

Don't ask me how people made a living in a situation where you don't have a job but there's always some deal to be made. Somebody needs something and you try to get that something for that person. You make a cut on it. It wasn't dealing in black market but people needed things. Maybe they had a ring, so they wanted to sell the ring and papa knew somebody who would buy the ring and already there's a deal made. Then there were lots of English money, gold money that was very valuable to have, more valuable than dollars, it was a gold coin. And lots of the Italian people had these gold coins because they didn't believe too much in their own money. And they had money that their relatives in America was sending them -- everybody had a relative in the United States -- there's always somebody. So they got money from there and turned it into valuable gold. Papa then helped them to sell it because they didn't know who to go to.

Through Howell, papa was in connection with the police. Actually papa saved lots of people because Howell was there in the intelligence to see who was the enemy and who was the foe and the pro and we knew that these people were so good to us, including the local police. The police chief said to papa, "When we get an order from Rome that we should do something to you people (Jews), in between Rome and me is a long way and it's actually up to me to enforce that order. I can take that paper and put it on the bottom of the pile or I can keep it on top of the pile, wherever I choose. And I don't see anything in you that I should do it because you are all very honorable and are helping our people." He was very good to all the immigrants. As you see, he was protecting us from the Germans. That order didn't come from Rome. Rome didn't even know what was going on. The order to leave Potenza to get out of the way of the retreating German soldiers came from the police chief.

Jewish people were living in other small towns which were more on the road of the military escaping Germans. There are two police in a small town like that because in those times there was not too much robberies and things going on, just somebody to pick up the phone and get orders from the city. The German comes to the office and wants the list of the Jews who are living there. The German doesn't speak Italian and the Italian doesn't want to understand the German. Well, he understands the word "Jews" but he says he doesn't understand what he's talking about. In between as they are discussing and making themselves understood, he tells his deputy to go out and warn all the Jews to go into hiding. He goes out the other door. He lets all the Jews know and they went into hiding. After lots of discussion, the Italian police opened the books and gave the Germans the list of Jews. Then when the German went to look for the Jews, they were not there.

That's the difference. When they came to Czechoslovakia, or to Poland, the Germans asked where are the Jews. The local people were happy to show them where the Jews are, and point out who were Jews. Because the

Germans couldn't know who the Jews were, that Polack and that Jew looked the same way; they looked just alike. But the Polish person told him that is a Jew so the German knew. That's the difference. That's the difference in a good human being and a vicious human being. The Germans would have never accomplished what they accomplished if the people of the towns and countries didn't oblige. The Germans didn't have a concentration camp inside Germany. All the concentration camps were in Poland and Czechoslovakia and Hungary and so on. Because they knew that all these people would be very helpful to them. Those people did more than the Germans did.

Well, lots of people came back from concentration camps and were killed by their neighbors. They said, "What did you come back for? We didn't want you? We thought we got rid of you." They shot them.

Some people ran away from concentration camps and came back to the camps because there they had more protection -- well dying one way or another -- but they felt they have more chances of surviving than outside of the concentration camps. There were a few people who were saved by the non-Jews but they had to have lots of means to do it. They gave them all their fortunes and everything. But when a poor guy came which run away from concentration camp, starved and hungry, they just killed him. They don't need another hungry person, especially a hungry Jew.

Italy doesn't know anti-Semitism. Really doesn't recognize it -- the folks, the people. Mussolini was more under pressure of Germany to do what he was doing, because he was not an anti-Semite. He was a fascist but fascist doesn't mean that they are anti-Jewish.

The newspaper caricatures, the Jews with the pious and beards, which there was not a Jew looking like that, the Italian Jew didn't look like that but the caricature was that. So when we came to Potenza and the people came to us saying, "You're not a Jew" We'd say, "Yes, we are." He says, "You're not a Hebrew, you don't look like it. You look like us Christians. Look at the paper, this is a Jew, not you." They couldn't bring to the people the anti-Semitism that they wanted because it has to be bred in you. Anti-Semitism has to be something that comes down in generations, fostered, part of the culture, brought down, in your sermons, in your priests, by the dinner table, in the mother -- like they say, "with the mother's milk." It is not something you can say, "you go and hate that person." An Italian can not do that.

Italians can not go and hate somebody, he'll ask you why. "Is he hurting me?" The Italian hates the German, always did because of previous wars and since then they knew the cruelty of the Germans. They always hated the Germans. So whatever the Germans brought there, it was not accepted. Only under the force of the German gun.

Mussolini was forced into it, he wanted to save his country from Hitler. Hitler wanted to take over Italy. It's right there on the border and Tirolia and all there is German, all German patriots. So he tried to avoid that by making an alliance. But it didn't work out anyways because the Germans really took over. Soon as the Germans came in Mussolini was just a puppet there, a ridiculous puppet. And then Hitler was fooled

also. He thought that Mussolini had more armaments and more things than he had. But Mussolini was fooled from his generals. He went on visits to the military outposts and they took the cannons from one post to another and everytime he'd come there was a big parade of all that armaments but it was always the same that kept going around. So you see, one was fooling the next.

During fascism, it wasn't as bad as we think for the people. Mussolini brought a lot of improvements to the country. He gave employment to everybody and everybody survived. With every stamp you had to get for documents, there meant employment and this way many civil servants were employed. They didn't make a great living but they could survive and this gave people pride. Pride in themselves.

For political punishment they used castor oil. They would come into your house at night and made you swallow a whole bottle of castor oil. They called it the "purga" (diarrhea) and that was the worst of it.

The Italians, especially the farmer, the people of the earth, were always better than the people of the city. With the progress, civilization, brought more the demand of money and the have and have-nots. In between the Italians it's more hate of the vendetta, wanting to be the stronger, and that "no one will tell me what to do." It's about honor not about politics that rivalry in between their own, than with the stranger, as long as you kept out of it. But they would give you their last shirt and take your last penny. It depends, if they can cheat you, they do it without any scruples. And then when he took away all your pennies what you had, the last penny, then he'll invite you to his house for dinner. It's kind of an attitude that when he cheats you, he shows you his shrewdness and when he invites you to his dinner table, he is a humane person.

I was thinking about Colonel Howell. During my pregnancy Colonel Howell felt I should go for walks and when papa wasn't home, he came to keep me company. So with the chauffeur, he took me out to the country -- and we were walking. We didn't talk because I didn't talk to him, I didn't like him at all. And we walked always separated like two people could be in between us. I was praying that he shouldn't come and save my life. He came very often when he came back from a trip. He'd come at night, knocked on the door, came in, said he's hungry, and we got up and gave him food. He felt very, very comfortable at our home. But he didn't talk to women; not even to my mother who spoke a perfect English, and not to me who spoke a perfect Italian. I spoke a very good Italian, as a matter of fact, I had less of an accent than your father. But the difference is, I forgot my Italian, he remembers it.

With Howell it was a friendship where he could talk to papa and papa could talk to him but I was never included in their conversations. I was just somebody who was there. But he was able to come in anytime of the day and feel comfortable. When you were born, he sent over a cake that the chef made the size of a wheel, with apricots on top and canned pineapple. It was something delicious and huge. And flowers, everyday I got fresh flowers -- a person who didn't talk to me yet. Then we moved to a nicer place and our neighbor came in to help. We had a one room

apartment with a kitchen. In the one room my mother slept in the living room and we slept in the bedroom. It was a small apartment but what it had was a stove, a heating stove to put coals in it. All our friends congregated by us because we had a stove.

In Italy also the evenings got very cold and damp. There were a few tables for card playing. Everybody came, everybody was smoking. I was worried you'd get sick from all that smoking. But I smoked also. You opened that door and it was all smoke. It was very nice and at that time met the mid-wives Mia and Pia.

gg: Were they your mid-wives?

ag: No, they came later. War was over but I didn't have the delivery in the hospital. The hospital was destroyed, but I did have a mid-wife and she was connected with a doctor just in case. I had a check up by the doctor once only but I went to the mid-wife, like by the end of the pregnancy, I went every week or so. She was a very modern mid-wife. Then at night I remember papa went to call her and she came and threw out everybody else. Papa was with me and you were born. I called you Gemma. And then she went and called her dog Gemma and I never spoke to her again. I was mad at her that when I saw her on the street. I turned my back to her. How could she do something like that? For her the dog was precious, I know, but I was very upset. I told her why too.

We made friends with Italian people who came from North Italy. It's the same thing with the San Diegans, they're San Diegans and don't want to have anything to do with outsiders. You make much easier friends with someone from another city because they are also looking for friends too. The people who live in the same town have already their social friends. Through the police chief and through other employees of the government, we made very nice friends. We had a pretty nice social life. The Italian social life is that you go to the cafe and you meet everybody there. You go for your aperatif and see everyone passing by.

You asked about the war in Potenza itself: One very terrible accident. There was a big military garrison there and there was an announcement that the war is over. All the soldiers ran out and everybody was celebrating on the streets. But then the English came and was bombarding and the Italians had thought the war was over and thousands of soldiers died. That was a terrible tragedy. Papa can tell the details of it.

In Potenza there were other struggles. There was no water, no food, no heat. In the evening, you should see how we went to bed, that's something to tell. We had special clothes to sleep in. Warm underwear, socks, sweaters, and a nightcap. That was a whole thing to go to bed. It was cold! The Italians wear summer and winter a very heavy undershirt, especially the men and then they wear the fancy shirts on top. Also city people. Because when you perspire the perspiration stays in the shirt and keeps you cool. When you are cold, the cold air can't go through it and it keeps you warm. They always wear these heavy woolen

undershirts with long sleeves. Just like the nun's habits are not very uncomfortable for the nuns because it keeps the sun out and keeps the cold out. Winter times we really never had snow. Once it was snowing, everybody came running, everybody came out to see snow.

Potenza was a city with its cafes and one movie house. We got acquainted with the owner of the movie house, Antonio, so we had free movies. And sometimes we went to see a movie two, three times because there was nothing else to do, especially the American movies with all the glitter and dancing. Fred Astair was dancing on the ceiling.

In the city the social life is on the main road, the promenade, and sitting in the cafe you see everybody passing by. They come to your table and say hello and spend a few minutes talking to you. That's 11:00 in the morning and then 6:00 in the evening.

I took you in the buggy and I went to the cafe. It was the same time as the Apel calls that we had to go to during the war. At that time we didn't go on the promenades, we didn't belong to that society. When the war was over, we belonged to that society. We went to dances, danced the jitterbug. The big band era was coming in, the American culture was coming in.

The American soldiers came in like conquerers; he came with the candies and chewing gum and silk stockings - and drunk. See, you never saw a drunk Italian but you saw drunk Americans, just rolling in the street. That was terrible, it was awful. You find a drunk Italian, he's happy, he's singing, he goes with two, three guys and they go on the street and sing. He's not harmful. The American doesn't know how to drink. The American drinks to get into a stupor and then he just rolls on the street. He's not a happy drunk. It was very embarrassing for us foreigners.

The Canadians behaved much better. The black soldiers from Africa behaved very well. The Americans were the only ones who behaved badly -- like they came with trucks and threw candies. The parents went and took the children in, they didn't want the candies to be thrown at them. It was humiliating. For that the American wasn't liked. He was making you feel he has it, and nobody wants to be told that he doesn't have. But it was just a passing.

Then came the black market and people got things. Even the black watch that I still have was bought on black market -- it's the Army WACS. Still in perfect condition from that time. We still have blankets and things, of course with holes in them by now.

I didn't do sewing anymore when I came back to Potenza from Corletto. We were liberated and papa was making money. As a matter of fact I was having clothes done for me. My mother had her social life too. She was very liked and accepted. They honored the older people, they weren't taken for granted and were given all the priorities, the seats. Naturally when you were invited for coffee, you brought your mother with you. It was never a question. She was sick but was doing all right. She was running the household and loved to play cards. She found men to

play with her even, she was a good cardplayer. She spoke some Italian and there were people her own age and they got together.

BARI

Then I decided to go to Bari and learn hat-making. I went to one professor (everybody who knows how to write is called a professor). He was a pattern maker, because I wanted to open a studio and when I come out from Italy, I should know how to do pattern-making, the real tailoring. He was giving courses and went to school in the morning with other students. I rented a room because it was a course for a few months. In the afternoon I learned hat-making, millinery. I bought all the things for it. Bari was a very nice city, I like it. It was much larger than Potenza, it was a port city. Then I came back to Potenza and making hats. I was making pretty good money on that. It was not as tedious as dress-making. You bought the felt, especially they were wearing the little nothing hats, and you put a feather in it.

Then we got jobs from a Jewish Rehabilitation Organization, Organization of Rehabilitation through Training (ORT). I got a job teaching shirt-making. I got it through knowing somebody. That was after the war and people were coming out from concentration camps. Around Bari were transient camps for people who came out of camps and were put into these transient camps until they got them to Israel or wherever people were going. They were in the vicinity of Bari in old military establishments. They put them there and all these Jewish organizations from United States came and were putting up help. ORT came in as one of the organizations. They were in Bari in an office and we knew somebody there.

I have to say here that I was a young person and pretty good looking, I could get any job I wanted to. So I knew somebody and told him I would take the job if my husband gets a job. There was no point otherwise. So they created a job, also from ORT, in agriculture, to teach them how to plant. As they were sending books with it, you learned as you trained. We moved to Bari and got a modern apartment that had a bathtub. It was a bathtub with a heating unit that you turn on the unit when you wanted hot water. Oh, but it was the first bathtub we had in our lifetime! It had nice rooms too.

In Potenza, one of the neighbors, a little girl was taking care of you. She ate with us and was with us but went home to sleep. She was about 12 or 13, Mariucha. She was your companion, you were in her charge. She went for walks with you, she played with you, and she was supposed to speak only the real Italian, no dialect because we wanted you to learn the real Italian. And she was a part of the family, we just loved her. When we moved to Bari, we took her with us. Her mother let her go with us, her family didn't have enough food at home. We clothed her and she had a very good place to stay. She ate by the table and all, she was part of the family. It was helpful to me because when you went to sleep, she went to sleep also, she was a companion, not a maid, she didn't do any housework -- there wasn't too much to do in between the two women in a small apartment, it was someone for you to play with.

She went to Bari with us and she stayed with us until we went to the United States. As a matter of fact, her mother begged us to take her to the United States with us. But we had enough difficulties, she couldn't go on our papers. At that time it wasn't like in her grandmother's times when you just went on the boat if you had enough money. In Bari she didn't know anybody, you were her only friend, except she made some friends with the neighbors. Bari had beaches and she took you there.

It was a nice living there in Bari. I worked hard, not that it was such hard work but that I had to take buses to go to the camps and coming back by buses again. It was a lot of traveling. I had classes in three camps. I was working every day. Where the camps were close by, I could go to two camps in one day. When the camps was farther and it was a larger one, I had different classes all the time.

We had difficulties. Like ORT sent out sewing machines through Switzerland, all the materials and everything we got came through Switzerland. They sent out brand new machines -- like 10 of them. Before the crates were opened, the machines disappeared. So again we had to make the requests to get more. How do you teach someone to sew without a sewing machine? On theory itself, it doesn't go. We had theory books and taught them measurements and how to thread a needle. These were people from camps. Some of the young people never even saw a needle. They wanted to learn some trade so when they come to the outside world they should be able to earn some money. Any sort of way, even if it's just temporary. When you say you know how to sew, you can get a job in a factory, it doesn't matter how good you are.

gg: Did they talk to you about their experience? What were your relationships?

ag: We had good relationships. People don't talk when they come out from camps. It's so hurtful, you're in so much pain that your first instinct is to forget it. For that it took 40 years for them to start talking about it, as you notice, now there's a resurrection of it. It's very painful. And it's very painful for the person who didn't go through it to admit...a guilt feeling, a guilt of survival. So there are two ways to it. You know snatches of things that happen but no one sits down with you and tell you a whole life story.

gg: Was this the first time you were aware of what was happening?

ag: I know before that already. When people were coming through, we knew. Even before, letters were coming, news were coming. Some survivors were trying to contact you. Things were coming out. There was a big surge of finding people. People were writing. Papa was writing to the town he came from, finding out who survived. Through that he found out his sisters survived. This was all after. But before, there were rumors coming out.

For instance, my uncle wrote to us from Czechoslovakia. He was a manager of a saw mill and wrote to us a very short note only letting us know that a cousin of mine will be arriving. What we found out, years later, was that my cousin had run away from a "working camp", a young Jewish people

working camp, not a concentration camp. This was a camp where they utilized people as much as they could as slave labor and when they couldn't use them anymore, they threw them into concentration camps. So my cousin ran away and he came to my uncle. My uncle put him in the train where they were exporting wood to Switzerland. They made an opening somehow where he was supposed to go to Switzerland and from there come to Italy, crossing the border somehow. He gave him money and food for him to survive. Well, he never made it. The dogs found him. So, you get a note "Arpart is arriving, look for him." But just a few words.

We had contact before they went to the concentration camps. From Italy, when we were in Genova, we were hungry, we asked them they should send us food. My uncle should have sent some dried bread, salami, jam. At that time they had it; see we were in different conditions. We were in immigration. I'm jumping from one to another because somehow in the end it ties together.

So we had an inkling, rumors. But you get so many rumors that you don't know what is true and what isn't true. Some are exaggerated, some are not made too much of. Stories are constantly going on, war stories, not war stories. It was very hard for us to know that maybe our families died and it was not so much that we were having a good time of it, but that we were helpless. We couldn't do anything. But still we thought, "How could it be so bad? So they will go through that factory work and they'll survive. People do survive and they'll be alright, they're healthy people." We never thought it could be possible. The mind doesn't want to accept many things.

Even the people who went to concentration camps, they went - not willingly - but meekly because they didn't expect anything too bad. So possessions went, that's not important. Life. And they knew they'd survive. They only knew when they came into the camps what is happening. Not even in the train. Otherwise they would have fought. They would have died in the trains, they would have jumped off the train. Because if they knew they would die anyways, so I jump off, if I die, I die here and not there. Because the will for survival is very strong.

Most stories I heard were from my friend, Lenka. But also only in snatches, never a whole story, never a whole period of a week. Just stories; how she was feeding her mother, how she buried her mother. She found her mother there. She was the one that was preparing them when they were coming in she was cutting their hair, that was from the beginning she said, she was taking off their rings and everything. Everything was written down, every ring and who's ring it was, it was terrible. But she was shaving them and when the hair grew up again, they had to shave them.

She said some people she didn't recognize because once your hair is shaved, pubic hair and everything, you don't recognize them. And at once she notices her mother there. It's very bad if you let them know you have relatives, you're not allowed to let them know you know each other because they destroy you for sure. Her mother didn't have any will of living and so she was feeding her, trying to bring her food at night. Well it didn't have any meaning because she went into the ovens anyhow. But one

sister she saved. But she said, "so I saved her for a year, so she was tortured for a year." Then her last job was taking people out from the ovens, the corpses. Can you imagine?

For that people don't talk about it. She has all these nightmares. It took her so many years to get over the nightmares. She was a young girl when they took her, 16. Here I know some women, one woman said she was one of the youngest in the camp to survive because children were eliminated right away. But if you appeared to be pretty strong, they kept you.

Everybody says they don't know why they were not killed right away. They took the children to one side and divided them and you went with your mother right away straight into the ovens, you just took off your clothes. At least they didn't have to be tortured. The ones who were tortured were the ones who survived from the labor camps. From the labor. They were all working, working in the factories. They survived as long as they could because when they couldn't use them anymore, so then they ended up in the ovens. But the people who came with trains and they saw they were over 40 or over 50, they just went straight into the ovens. What they did, they gave everybody a piece of soap in their hands and told them they were going to take a shower. And they went willingly to take a shower, they were all so tired and dirty from that terrible train ride. In the shower was gas. From there they put them in the ovens to cremate them.

Lenka, for all these years that I knew her, I know of these nightmares. I know it's enough to have to go through the nightmares without having to talk about it. She was under psychiatric care. She got T.B. that was related to the concentration camp. You don't probe but you talk. I started to ask questions and it was very, very painful for both us. For her, for me. And I'm still going around with that guilt, that complex of survival. Not that they are telling me, "look how good it was for you," but a certain feeling you have: Maybe I could have helped, maybe if I would have been there I could have done something. You have a certain guilt about it. All the Jews have that guilt. Now the American Jews have the guilt. "If we would have only known."

Florence came to me when she was here last time. She's starting to read these books about Roosevelt and all these books coming on the market now and she was saying how she feels guilty of not knowing what was going on. I asked her, didn't her parents talk about it at the supper table? Her parents were born in Europe, they have all their family there. Did they ever mention this or that person was killed or disappeared? She said, "No, we never knew. We went to our dances, we worried about the right length or our bobby socks and skirts and just looking for a good time." She said, "I'm older than you are so that means that during the concentration camps times, I was already grown, I was in the working force." She was not a child anymore, nor her friends. They are my contemporaries and they swear they do not know. I said, "You didn't care to know." She said, "Nobody talked about it. We had so many other things, and then the war was on." She was married in the second world war and her husband was in the war. She said, "We had our worries and the Jewish question of Europe never came up." I said didn't your

husband, who's family was in Europe know about it? She said, "No, we didn't, the parents never spoke about it."

I can't believe it. I cannot believe it. But I do believe it. You hear it in the book, The Haven, where the State Department didn't want the people to know. That if more people knew about it, they would revolt, they would demand to do something.

People from the concentration camps told me that they were sure, they were positive that when the Americans were coming into the war that they would be the first ones coming to liberate them. But they didn't. They saw them passing over the camps, praying they would drop a bomb. They couldn't believe, why they weren't throwing down a bomb on all that installation that was there; of factories that these people were working in. And they knew that the Americans had the plans of the camps and that the Americans knew about it. And do you know what the excuse of the Americans were? They didn't want to endanger the civilians, the people in the camps. Endanger their lives!? They are dead anyhow! Maybe there would have been more survivors and the Germans would have run away faster from there. But a bomb was too costly on them, on their compound, on their facilities. You could see what was a chimney and what was a factory, you could see all these things. Just thinking, without being a military wizard, you could figure it out. Well, the more Jews were killed, the better for the world. That's the only attitude.

Why didn't Roosevelt let that ship in with those people, and sent them back where they came from? Who wants people here, who wants to feed them? Who wants sick people? The Cubans who came out of the jails, all the criminals, that's alright. That Castro, I give him all the credit for what he did. He's a smart man.

Then Roosevelt takes 1,000 people, liberated people, that were easy to bring over, make them sign papers that they will go back soon as the war is over to the country of their origin.

gg: What happened? Weren't you supposed to go on that boat?

ag: Yes, we were supposed to go on that boat. We were living in Potenza, all these immigrants living together talking always of possibilities there are to get out, so we heard of this transport of 1,000 people. We signed up for it. But when we read the small print and they told us what the requirements are, we declined. First it came at a time when you were eight days old, you were hardly born and we didn't want to go on a voyage on the sea under the situation of bombs and war. Secondly it would be a very crowded ship, we knew that. What was more what kept us back was the signing that we would go back after the war. Who wants to go back to where we came from? To our country of origin? It's unthinkable.

Lots of people signed because they thought they would have children there, they would fight, there would be a way to come out, or had relatives. They said American would never let them go back. But Roosevelt never thought of keeping them here. It was that he wanted the Jewish vote because the Jews were starting to yell to do something. That

was the easiest for him; to take them out of Italy where people were liberated. Even if the Yugoslaves came and were still in the camps around, but they were liberated, they were not under Hitler anymore. They got into Faramonte which was like Campagna where papa was. That was not bad. They had a roof over their head and they knew they won't be killed.

We had our apartment, we had where to live. Why should we leave for something so insecure? So that was the reason. It was a very, very big decision. Talking, deciding, talking to people and go back again. Colonel Howell knew about it, we were talking to him about it, and getting advice from other people. So that from Potenza, I don't think anybody really left. Papa knows people written about in The Haven but he knows them from Campagna. There were lots of things. People were also going to Santo Domingo. There was a transport to Santo Domingo and we decided not to go because they didn't take my mother. You have to be a certain age. They wanted young people to work in the plantations. We signed up for that but when they wouldn't take my mother, there was no point in going. A big group of Slovak people that we knew went to Santo Domingo. We even heard from them back in Italy and even heard here from them.

Everybody tries to survive, to make it, make it somehow. But there was so much against it. But the people in the United States were not better than the people in Germany or Poland. If something like that should happen here, another Hitler should come here in the United States, there would be the same thing. Look, they went to Viet Nam, they went to Korea, they burned the people down. They hosed them down with fires. They didn't think anything of it. So they wouldn't do it here? They would put them in camps and blow fire on them. They will kill them faster than they did in Germany because they'd have better means.

gg: Well, you know the very first aerial bomb was thrown by the U.S. on a town of black people inside the United States.

ag: Sure I didn't hear about it -- and I live here. So how can in Czechoslovakia one hear what's going on in Germany? Or in that camp? No news comes out. So you cannot defend yourself. They were defending themselves in the Warsaw ghetto because they were all in one place, they could fight even if it was with a fork. And they knew it was a useless fight because they didn't have any help from the outside. The underground didn't want to help them. If you read about it you'll see how the underground was against them, they were railroading them. They were promising them things they never got or brought. They were hoping because the underground was against the Germans. It's very interesting. We have to be very careful. The world was against us, is against and will be against us. It doesn't matter that we have high officials in the government, they are very easily replaced with just a stroke of a pen the whole thing can be done. And as we don't know about the bomb in St. Louis, so we wouldn't know what will happen in any city. They can bring us to a camp and hose us down and my neighbor won't even know that I left. Everybody is occupied with himself. Everybody has to have his television set, his car, his well being. And that's all around the

world. We're looking at the pictures of the people starving in Africa. I'm not better.

When I was in the hospital there were four ladies visiting me and we came to talk about Africa and the hunger and how terrible it is. Yes, I said, isn't it terrible, what are we doing about it? "Well, what can we do? It's not a story of today, that hunger has been going there a long time." Or when it was an earthquake in Greece we sent things and when it was an earthquake in Italy we sent things. But then they said, "Oh, we saw on television that the people were not getting anything, just the people around the big boats, not the little people, they were selling on black market." I said, I know black market, but it's still that something trickles down to the poor guy. So they will have less, but it's better than nothing. So then they say they can't do anything, there are too many, that kind of thing. But I'm not better, I do the same thing. So I send money or whatever they ask, clothing, blankets. But then they didn't want to take anymore, they said it was too many, too much shipment costs. But I said, a blanket is more worth it to them than \$10 because they can't buy a blanket for \$10, or for any amount. But you have to go through it, you have to live through it to understand it. Nobody else can understand.

Oh yes, the ladies came from Rochester and Syracuse and were making curtains for the people in the Oswego camp and everybody was very happy to be busy, they did something. They came home and said, "Oh, now I can do." And they felt very good. And they didn't do the deed for the people in that camp but for themselves. When you help somebody, it's not as much that you're thinking of that person as you're thinking of yourself. To make yourself a justified human life. Especially in the Jewish religion, it's part of the religion to help your fellow man. Well, I guess the societies and all, they do, they work hard, and do their utmost.

In Bari I had my husband, Mariucha, Gemma, my mother and I was working and travelling and I felt very important, and I felt good. Papa was working for ORT also, we made a nice living. That was a good time already; war was over for us. War was over for everyone! That was 1948. We had Italian friends. We met people from Czechoslovakia there.

We were invited to come back and help them out to re-establish Czechoslovakia in the old form of democracy. They didn't have any so-called intelligencia there left as they were mostly killed or had left and they were asking people to come back. Then Banisch was one of the disciples of Masaryck, the first president of Czechoslovakia after the first world war. Banish took over the government and everybody looked up to him but as every new government and new forces are coming in, there are fractions and he was killed, thrown out of the window. The new government didn't last long, the political situation was very bad and the Russians moved in. That was in the beginning of the whole thing, 1946, 47.

Papa went back to see what was happening. We thought, why shouldn't we try to go back to Czechoslovakia and live a normal life again? He found two sisters and found some friends, and went back to the farm where he was

raised. It was in a shambles and it would have been a big procedure of getting things back, people took it over. He didn't get anything back. Also were things my uncle had given to people to hold for him. We had documentations, descriptions of everything and to whom he gave. Papa went to these people and they said, they never heard of that uncle. And we knew them, he was a music teacher and I was taking lessons from him so we knew him and was a good friend of the family. But once you have to give back possessions, you cease to be a good friend, right? Then papa sent a telegram saying "We are continuing to eat spaghetti." That meant forget about Czechoslovakia, it's not the place for us. He's coming back. So when he came back, we started thinking seriously of where are we going.

We hoped to stay in Italy, we could have gotten Italian citizenship which was offered to us but still it was Europe. Europe was getting stale and bad and old and decrepit. Too much blood on the ground.

Later I went back for my cousin, Yoland's, wedding. I went to Rome and bought lots of fabric, pure silks and valuable materials and put it in the suitcases between my clothes and went on my merry way to Czechoslovakia. I went to the border of Switzerland and they opened my suitcases. I didn't expect them to open my suitcases; I looked so nice and innocent and prim and proper, how would they? Well, they did and as they were opening the dresses, the silk was falling out. They asked me what I was doing with so much. I told them I was taking it to relatives as gifts. I thought I could get away with it because the Italians can so easily be charmed, but Swiss, forget it. Anyways they said that if I could provide an export permit I could go. So they called up the police in Potenza. They called papa to the police station. Papa went to the bank where they did these permits and got right away the permit and did it over the phone so I could leave right away. All because papa was known in the city and at that time he was connected with Howell.

The Czechs don't mind when you bring things in, they didn't even look. Whatever you bring in they would welcome. So I gave to all the relatives. First Yoland who was living in Prague.

gg: How did Yoland fare during the war?

ag: My cousin Yoland was living in Prague as a young girl and was employed by my uncle on the outskirts of Prague. He was the wealthy uncle, a very handsome man, very tall. For a European to be that tall was unusual. She settled there in Prague and married a lawyer from Kremnica. I went to visit them before she was married. My mother sent me there to get a little bit of a city taste. I stayed with her for a month. She took me to dances and showed me the city. I got my first period there and she showed me to use tampons -- they were much bulkier then.

She left my uncle and found another job. It's never good to work for family, they take advantage of overtime and living in the household and also being the maid at the same time. I had fun in Prague and felt very comfortable with her.

Well, she went to Terezin when Hitler came. It was a camp but also a transient camp because from there they went to Buchenwald and Dachau and the rest. Because Terezin was close to Prague. She lost her husband there, we don't know where, he never came back. She went through this thing where the rest of her life she's sick, she's really a sick person. People who came out of the camps were sick, either mentally or physically. They never got well.

You were asking how Yoland survived. She doesn't know how she survived. You just survived, they don't know how; they worked and they dragged themselves everyday. She was going through hell out there. When she came out she looked like a skeleton. She went to Prague and started to look for her husband and brothers, etc. She said every day they went on the streets standing, just looking at people to see if they recognize anybody. And there were right away kitchens put up and places for people to sleep. There were sanitoriums and hospitals for them. I assume it was the government.

The only conversation she said everyone had was "I come from that or that city, do you know so and so? Did you hear of anybody by that name?" She had eight sisters and brothers and she's the only survivor. Her parents and everyone. I figured one day that I had 18 or 19 cousins and two survived. And all my aunts and uncles except Hugo and his wife were killed and that's because they didn't go to concentration camps.

Hugo and Bertha lived in a small town and found people who hid them in their basements. My aunt attempted suicide a few times but my uncle was with her and it wasn't successful. But I don't know if it wouldn't have been better for her, I don't know now that I'm looking at it. She was a sick person the rest of her life; she didn't have a healthy moment; and their marriage was not good; they were very sad people; no music, no smiles; no happiness. They didn't go anywhere. My uncle died about five years ago and my aunt died about three years ago but she hated every minute of her life since that time they were in hiding.

When I came back to Prague, Yoland waited for me at the train station. I came back to Prague because Yoland was getting married to Walter. It was a good reason to go back. They were getting married because she got pregnant. She met Walter after liberation. He lost his wife and I think two children. So families and people tried to couple up and make families and tried to make a new life, a new start, a meaning to give to their lives. They had to do something with their lives. Most of the marriages that I know of my generation are mostly all second marriages.

I stayed with her in her house. They had very small quarters, I had my bed in the kitchen. I think they were still there when you went to visit. The brother of her first husband was staying there also which I knew from Kremnica. We were three or four people just hanging around there. And then I went to see my sister-in-law who lived in Budweitzer (papa's sister, Helena). I stayed with her but she was a little bit crazy by then.

She had been married to a non-Jewish man in the military. He was a very nice, very meek person. They had a lousy life together and finally they

divorced. He got liberated. That's the father of Maria. They had a son too. She was never in a concentration camp because she passed as a non-Jew, she had many husbands, etc., but she's mixed up, she's not alright. All this guilt, all these losses of relatives and parents; it's very painful.

Then I went to Slovakia to my uncle who lived in Banstra Binstrika. They told me that when I passed their window to come to their house, they nearly had a heart attack because they thought it was my mother. It took them quite a while to recuperate. It was very comfortable with them, I liked them.

Then I traveled to go to Kremnica and as I'm on the train, a lady approaches me by my maiden name and asked me if I'm Alice Frisch, I said "yes." Oh, she said, she recognized me and was so sorry about what happened to us and how they tried to save people and tried their best. All lies. Everybody came to tell how they tried to save us which were all lies. If just a tenth of the people were doing what they were saying, they did, the whole Jewish population would have been saved. But now the remorse came.

I came to Kremnica, went to the cemetery, my father was buried there. I knew the rest of the family all died in concentration camps and were buried who knows where except my father. I left. I didn't go even to a restaurant or anything. I just took a taxi to the cemetery and went back to the station and waited there until the train came. I didn't want to see anybody or places of memory. Everything was still there, those buildings stayed for thousands of years, they were built that way. But I didn't have any attachments; I didn't want to have anything to do with them.

I have no recollection and no nostalgia about Czechoslovakia. When I went back in 1947 and I wanted to see what the country looked like, what the people are like and what changes had occurred -- if I find a friend. I did not find a friend. I went to my relatives, I saw the people on the street who looked very gloomy and all grey. The Prague was not the same city I left many years back. It was very disappointing. People who I was looking for, I didn't find. They were mostly killed in the concentration camps.

These people started to make a new life for themselves. They were very sad. They could only remember their bad memories. They couldn't remember anything good because there wasn't anything good but they had to put the pieces together. Wherever I went the conversation always came back to the camps because that's all they knew. They were all young when they were taken away. They didn't have enough schooling and all they knew was how to survive and were grateful for survival. And still they felt very guilty. They had the guilt of survival. It's very complex just to listen and think about it.

How do you pick up the pieces? I don't know. They really had a hard time. But life is stronger than all that. Today they have gilded homes and try to have possessions just to prove to themselves that they are alive. It's not that they enjoy it so much but it has a meaning for them

of survivalship; of being here and not killed by Hitler. But they are very sick people. Lots of them are under psychiatric care; new sickness are coming out related to concentration camps; they are ruined. Their lives are not happy and never will be.

I was very happy to leave Czechoslovakia and so glad to see Italy again. They were so much more alive. Czechoslovakia was so gray; everything was the same. Italians have less than the Czechs but they were happy, they lived with a gusto.

Anyways, then was the debate. We made application to go to Israel and we were on the Czechoslovak quota for the United States, which we found out later was open because during the war that quota was closed. People from Czechoslovakia couldn't go to America during the war. Each country has a quota of people. Our quota then was very high, open; we were like the first numbers. But we needed an affidavit to come to the United States which we didn't have. We didn't have a sponsor. The sponsor was responsible to guarantee that for five years we will not be a burden for the government. That's all the sponsor was.

I had an aunt living in the United States and we wrote her a letter. We got a very sad letter back that she really couldn't afford it, that she can't guarantee or cannot do anything about it. As a matter of fact, we wrote to them that we wanted to pay all the legal expenses and they should take a lawyer to deal with the papers and we would pay for everything. We told them the amount of money we had in dollars and that we are paying our own transportation, we needed only sponsorship paper. And if they want, we would put money in the bank in case we loose our jobs so that they wouldn't be responsible.

gg: What were they afraid of?

ag: Well, when you have with ignorant people to do, that's what comes out. They just said, "Sorry, we are poor and we don't have that." He had a cleaning and tailoring store and they had an only son, Arthur, and they owned a house. So we got a big sob story about how terrible it is living here, and how awful they are living, and how hard the times are, and what hard times during the war; how they had to stay in line for butter and for cigarets; if we only knew what hard times they have. That was the end of it. So we knew.

Then we started to go to organizations. We wrote to all the Czech organizations, Slovak organizations, Jewish organizations, wherever we could, wherever we got an address, we wrote. Hanzky came out before us and found out that the Quakers are giving affidavits, sponsorships. So we wrote to the Quakers in Philadelphia and wrote of our status. We told them what we had and what we didn't have; that we wanted just the paper and we promised we would not have any difficulties; we didn't want anything else.

We got right away back a letter from the secretary of that organization telling us that they would be meeting within 10 days and she would bring it in front of the Board. Two weeks later we got a letter back that a certain Mr. Karr is taking the sponsorship and he got in touch with the

Jewish organization that he's giving the papers but they should arrange the transport for us, which the Jewish organization paid for. They willingly did it as soon as they saw the paper of sponsorship.

So we left Italy. I left it with a very heavy heart. I think it was the saddest moment of my life. I was crying so hard. You see my mother didn't want us to go to the United States. She was telling us all the pitfalls and the hard working conditions, that you make money but you don't know if it's worth it to have that money because of what you have to put in to make it. Labor and all these difficulties. And New York. By the way Mr. Karr made stipulations that we were not allowed to stay in New York or in Philadelphia where he's from. We were very happy to not go to New York. Anyway we left.

I left Italy like you leave your country of birth. I considered it as my country, I grew up there. I was 17, what are you with 17? At 17 a European girl is very inexperienced. I didn't know the world, just the town I lived in. So I went to Prague once or twice but I didn't have any life experiences. Living in Italy through the war, I knew good times and bad times; I learned opera and an appreciation of art; I grew up there. It's been 40 years I'm here and I never went back. Papa promised me in 10 years we would come back. Well we didn't. There were other things that came up.

ATLANTIC CROSSING

You had a very bad trip on the boat crossing the Atlantic Ocean. You got ear infections which lasted a long time. You got it on the ship and it lasted for years in Cleveland. Your grandmother had a bad trip also -- it was a very stormy sea. I had a wonderful time -- all these Italian sailors! Papa had a wonderful time also. Everyone was sick and we were the only ones sitting in the dining room. They gave us all that food.

As a matter of fact we got very acquainted with the Italian sailors. They asked us to bring some of their suitcases down with us. They opened them and showed us there was no contraband. They had gifts for their relatives, doilies and things which they had in Europe but are not allowed to bring. So later they came to the hotel and picked it up. But they were really very good to us, they always gave us fruit for the night to take with us. Very nice guys.

Papa makes friends very easily. For that he helped a lot during the not having in Potenza and in Corletto. He went to the grocery lady and baker lady. The women were the ones behind the counter giving out bread. They know him, would shout out, "Belo" and give him a package. He did have that charm. He was very good with women.

gg: And you were good with the men...

ag: Well, that was another thing. Yes, I never had to stand in a bus. Only when I went to Mexico with you and they gave YOU the seat. For that I remember and I was laughing so then, aha, the things are turning. I had all the privileges that a woman has and they didn't pinch. It's only

the American women that get pinched. Anyways, Belo saved us a lot of hungry days through that, he knew how to go and knew where to get the food for us. And the Italians told him, "We are helping you because you are a stranger. You don't have anyone to give you. We have brothers and sisters and relatives and if we don't have, they will share with us, but you don't have anybody so we have to help you." He heard it over and over and over. Again I'm saying, that's the Italian. Not the Italian that everyone thinks of as Mafia, oh no.

NEW YORK

So we came to New York. The Jewish organization was waiting for us on the dock and they took us right away, I assume Ellis Island wasn't there anymore. Oh my God, New York! The Jewish Organization rented a part of a hotel on Riverside Drive because they had always people coming and so they always had rooms for them. Big, everything was so very big and tall. It was around Thanksgiving time, do you remember the turkeys hanging everywhere? Do you remember the big oranges in the windows? We went looking in the windows. We saw grapes and strawberries -- in winter! Oh, I HAD to have a cherry in winter. But the big disappointment was when you bit into it, it didn't have any taste whatsoever. And the parsley was greener than I ever saw parsley in my life. We went in the streets just looking at things. Looking and looking. Just the store mannequins and everything. I brought very nice clothes with me but I was too fancy for here. I got the latest fashions - I remember a very tall umbrella that I brought - but United States was not at that time the latest in fashion and so I didn't have what to wear.

We came from Italy and knew that we would be freezing to death in New York, especially coming in November. So we brought very fine wool underwear, very thin that they were wearing. But what happened was that when you come on the buses it was hot, when you come visiting homes, it's hot and you're dying. So we were warmly dressed underneath which you couldn't take off when you visit someone and so we couldn't wear that. We needed a coat more than anything else. Just all these different things.

We lived in New York only for a few weeks or months in that hotel until we decided where to go. We took classes in English there. The Ephraimsons already lived in New York and we went to visit them. We knew quite a number of people who left Potenza before us for America.

Our aim, our dream was to move to California because it was the closest to southern Italy, climate wise. We talked to the social worker and the other immigrants. They said, "Who goes to California? Hunger, you'll never find a job, you'll never make it, it's a wasteland, forget it." The social worker talked us out of it. The next thing we knew was Cleveland because my aunt lived here. Not that she made us come here, believe me. But it was the thought that there are lots of ethnic neighborhoods and industry-wise, there were many facets. They explained to us if you can't work in one industry, you can find a job in another one, that there would be more jobs available. And it was true.

So we made arrangements with the Jewish agency in Cleveland which waited for us at the station. That was by the way, my first and last railroad ride in the United States. They brought us at Parkwood Drive where the Jewish agency had a house, they owned the house for the transient people. It was very smart. The people come, they assign you a room and there are other people living there and you share the kitchen. Then you go to the Jewish Family Service and they try to place you in jobs and so on.

When we were coming to the United States, my mother wrote to my aunt that we had all the papers and that we were coming. She wrote us back how happy she was that we are coming, we should let her know where we are living because she will make shmaltz and jelly and send it to us.

Well, we came to Cleveland and lived there a few weeks, were settled already at the transient house, papa was working at a warehouse. The Jewish Family Service didn't find him that job. My mother had a good friend living in Cleveland from her previous years in New York. That Yetta died to our unhappiness because she was very supportive to us. If she had been alive, she would have sent us the affidavits. Her daughter lived in Shaker Heights in Cleveland and we got in touch with them. Her son was in the army in Italy and my mother was corresponding with him when his grandmother was still living and she gave him our address. Through them papa found that job in the notions warehouse. They were helpful in their ways. We expected more but you have to think where they are coming from. They invited us for Sunday dinner and that was very nice. And they gave us a broken up chair which we had to thank them for and throw out. But for them, they gave us something. We didn't bring that chair up not even. We had to find somebody with a car to bring the chair home, pay the man for transportation, and then throw it out. But they tried.

I found a job through the Jewish Family Service in a factory sewing. Oh my God! All these sewing machines going, I didn't know what I'm doing! It was a terrible experience. I thought I'm a seamstress and here I'm sewing a little piece the whole day, a little piece and I didn't know what I'm sewing. When I came home and my mother asked me "what were you sewing?" I'd say mother, it was 2 inches but I don't know what. It took me I don't know how many weeks to find out it was a sleeve cuff. You didn't open that bundle even, it's just the seam.

One day in between sewing I stood up to go to the bathroom. Everybody stopped and was in shock. I said, heck, I have to go to the bathroom. They said, "You don't go to the bathroom, you go when the whistle calls you, then you can go to the bathroom." They told me, the forelady came and said "What do you mean you went to the bathroom? The whole thing stopped! Don't you know that woman is waiting for your bundle? You don't get up. You have to make enough so that other woman has enough because she wants to make more and you have to supply two women..." that kind of a thing.

When I came home, I'd say, mama, talk to me, talk to me! I felt I lost my tongue. You go on a bus, you don't talk to anybody, you don't know the language. You go to the factory and NOBODY talks to you. You go eat your lunch and are sitting there all by yourself, that outcast. I was

hoping there was another outcast with me. Two outcasts is better but I was the only outcast. I found out later it was a ladies garment factory for larger sizes. I never bought anything from them. They were nice to me though.

What happened though is that I had troubles with my teeth and had to go to the hospital for surgery so I quit. It was the best thing that happened in my life. I had to quit. We didn't know how much they paid me, you are completely that greener. You have no idea about anything, what they pay, if they cheat you, nothing. At once I got a very nice check in the mail, back pay and overtime pay. But while you're there they give you a piece of paper in your hands and you go home and say that's the paper of what I made. It was enough, we could live nicely, especially when your requirements are so low. We were able to make from one chicken five meals. Now it's different; once chicken for one meal.

It was a completely different way of life -- scary, very scary. You are so intimidated, you feel so small, so nothing, so meaningless. So that factory job was over with the surgery.

gg: How was that surgery process?

ag: I went to the dispensary at the hospital and they told me I had bad teeth. I always had bad teeth. Actually I don't know what they told me, I didn't understand them. You are like a lamb and they tell you "you come tomorrow and we do more work." I go home by bus and tell my mother I go in tomorrow. My mother asks whether she should go with me and I said, no they won't do anything, I didn't know what they were saying. I go in and they do surgery. They were removing two teeth which were growing on top of my gums. They gave me 13 stitches and everything and they sent me home. They sent me home on the bus! If they would have anybody there to explain to me, my mother would have come with me, somebody would have picked me up, we would have taken a taxi, something. I hardly could make the stairs to go home. I came home and I was very, very sick.

What I want to bring out with it is if that social worker had just cared a little bit, she knew what was going on. She was coming with me to the hospital dispensary, she could have told me "mother" or something because they knew I had a mother and a husband. She could have written me a note to take home and not let me go through that ordeal. It was very humiliating, knowing that family is there and nobody is with me because they didn't know they should be with me; that we were so uninformed.

I was in bed for three days. Then when I went back to get my stitches out, my mother went with me. Then it was better, when we realized what was going on. We didn't know what a surgery it will be. These are very painful experiences of starting in a country and not knowing the language.

Going to school, we went in the evening. That was nice. We had a wonderful, wonderful teacher. She taught us to say hello and good-bye and how to stand up and how to go away. She'd say "button and unbutton the coat" and she put on the coat and buttoned and unbuttoned. I'll

never forget how many times she did it. Or she went to the door and "shut" the door and "opened" the door. They were two words for the same motion. That was very good and we loved her class. She was doing that evening school for many many years. We just adored her and there we met people who were in the same boat, the same time coming here.

I didn't go back to the factory after the surgery. I went to Jewish Family Service to find some work and I told them I could do alterations. But as I left the office, it was downtown, I went from one store to the next and asked for alteration work. The first job they sent me to was a very exclusive dress shop but I couldn't understand their method of working. Alterations is a method of working that you have to know. They gave me work and if I didn't do it the right way or if it took longer than they expected, they were very angry with me. So on my day off, Saturday, I went more downtown, not to such exclusive stores.

I found a job by Davies store where the foreman was of Jewish origins and could speak some Yiddish and could help me. Also two of the ladies who worked there were Jewish. So there was already a different feeling, they were helping you. They were showing you how to do it, explaining to you because they wanted I should make it. I worked there until my sons were born. Three or four years. I got a raise in my salary, I got to be a fitter, being called on the floor to fit the women's clothes.

Each floor had it's own fitter so they asked for me because they liked my attitude and my fitting. Being younger had lots to do with it, they like the younger woman, most of the others were older ladies. They don't like to hear her "chrecht" when she bends down and so on. I came with new ideas and a smile; smiling helps a lot. I made well. I was working into my pregnancy and until my mother passed away. Then I stayed home.

gg: When did your mother die?

ag: My mother died when I was in my 7th month of pregnancy with Raymond and Robert (twins) when she was 62 years old. October 1951. Then life went on. We got jobs, we got a house, we got children. We expected one child and got two.

gg: How was it when she died?

ag: It was awfully hard. I didn't know how to cook. I had a hard time with you because you were the apple of her eye and were spoiled. For the two months before the boys were born we were doing fine; I did all the same things with you that my mother had done with you, going Saturdays to drawing lessons at the museum and watching movies and having lunch. We went to the museums, took the buses, and really we had a nice time. But then when the boys were born I couldn't do it anymore and you were continuing with piano lessons from the house but you couldn't have the whole attention like you had because I couldn't give it to you and you were very resentful. Not resentful of the boys but of my time; your change of status. That was expected. I remember I bought a doll before I went into the hospital about the size of a newborn child so that when I came home from the hospital it would be easier for you to understand.

You stayed with the Hollenders when I was in the hospital and also when my mother died, those days where there was so much commotion. My aunt never offered to take you or take care of you. I remember once later when you and the boys were bigger I had to go someplace with papa on a Sunday afternoon and I called her if she would come and just stay a couple of hours. She said she was busy. I never asked her anything again, ever.

The boys were born while we were on Gooding Street. When the doctor told me I was going to have twins, I said it's not possible, I can't afford to have twins, and never thought of it again. You know the doctor can make mistakes too, especially if you say no. I prepared everything for one child. But you know, I can say one thing but the doctor and reality -- they were twins! Nice skinny twins, they were premature and I was afraid to touch them. We took a nurse in, a practical nurse because with two babies you need help. And surprisingly even if we only prepared for one child, somehow another bed surfaced. Our friend, Louis looked into it and brought me things. You prepare enough for one child for three layers, so it was enough things to spread around. We managed very well. Then you got your room back that you had shared with your grandmother. We had two bedrooms. In the larger bedroom we had our bed and the two cribs. We were in very cramped quarters.

But we managed and papa started looking for a house. That was during the times of the Korean War when housing was very hard, especially with children; they'd laugh at you. First we were looking for an apartment because we didn't have money for a house. It was not possible. Papa took a vacation and we went to Galion so he'd have time to look because if we were home he'd never have the time. And then he found a house on Oak Road.

We didn't have enough money for a down payment. An old friend of my mother from her first stay in the United States and who was a relative to Yoland, was married to a doctor and was widowed, she lent us the money for the house. We lived there for many years. It was a comfortable place to live. I had enough room to sew and I know without my sewing we would never have managed, and I'm very proud of it. We cooked and we baked and we had parties and always had food, it was alright. Cleveland was good to us. Actually, when you are young, the weather doesn't mean so much.

A normal life was going on; learning to drive a car, raising children, having teenagers, wanting to do the right thing, and so on. That's America. You compare notes and every time, your life is better. I was very fortunate; I have beautiful children. I'm patting my own shoulders, it's my doing.

gg: Even though none of us are rich or famous?

ag: It's o.k. there's time, you will be one day.

gg: What about the Family Service?

ag: The Family Service, when we had dealings with them, we were very resentful of their not being compassionate enough. But now when I think

back on it, I can understand them much better. They have rules and regulations which they have to obey and go by. They have structures. We who are in need and were asking for something, it was hard enough for us to ask for it and then being rejected or saying our budget doesn't allow, or you've overdrawn your budget, or whatever, it's a rejection and a humiliation. And then we come home and scream and say look, all these people are getting money and we're not getting anything. Look at the bureaucracy, etc. I was very resentful. But now I'm grateful to them. They gave me a home, they gave me a start, and if they would have babied us all the time, we wouldn't have gone on our own, kind of. We resented that they didn't have anyone there that spoke another language. They could have had someone on the staff, especially Cleveland with its mixtures of cultures. Again, we were lucky because my mother spoke English so she could translate.

Life in the United States was very good to us but I have good memories, very, very dear memories. If I compare the people of Italy with the people of the United States, the American people are very dry with no feelings. Everything is surface, no compassion. Neighbors are not the same. If I compare the people of Italy with the people in the United States, the American people are very dry with no feelings. Everything is surface, no compassion. Neighbors are not the same. In Italy people try to help do things for you, felt sorry for you, had compassion.

I left Italy with a very very heavy heart. I loved it there. It was my country and I always promised myself to go back but I never did.

But now I want to tell you about my mother because she was a most interesting person.

ERNA FRISCH

My mother's name is Erna Frisch. Her parents were Bertha and Jacob Kohen. She was a real Kohen, born Kohen with a K. I think the "C" Cohens are here in the United States. She had nine brothers and sisters and was born in Kremnica, Czechoslovakia in 1889. Her father was a school teacher and they had a tavern. They never owned a house, always renting and living behind the tavern. My grandmother was running the tavern.

There a tavern was where the workers stopped when going to work, he stops there for a shot of schnapps and then on the way home too. Then sometimes they came in the evening also to fraternize. They take the whiskey in the morning to make their blood run; it's on the way to the gold mines. When they went 5:00 in the morning she had all the glasses prepared with the schnapps in it already. That was in addition because a school teacher couldn't support nine children.

My mother was telling me that raising nine children was actually not too hard on my grandmother because each child took care of another one. As you grew up you took care of the household. They also always had a little bit of maids helping. You see, the people coming from the country came to the city and wanted the children to have some place to stay and be hired out in a household. So you always had maids around and it was

enough for them to have food. Of course you got some pay also but food was the important part in any negotiation. And you treat these girls as part of the family.

I remember we had one, they were my friends, they had their own room and my mother always made them a Christmas tree and we knocked on her door and went to say hello, we wanted to see the Christmas tree. We brought a little gift. My mother cooked their traditional meal that they have for Christmas. You know, you respect someone else's religion. My grandmother did it always.

These girls left only when they got married. You went to their weddings and they came back and visited and brought their children to show you. It's kind like that. For that reason my family, my aunts and uncles never thought that they would be sent off or killed because they were so integrated with the rest of the population. They always knew that they did good things for them and they couldn't expect anything else back.

My mother went to the United States when she was 16 years old without knowing anybody. Why did she go? Because there were too many children at home. She wanted to get away from it, she was about a middle child but she was the gutsy one. She had a sense of adventure and wanted to see what was on the other side of the mountain. She was always very curious.

She did have an address of a cousin of a cousin of a cousin. When she came to the U.S. she went to that cousin. It was a common thing at that time to come to somebody. They had a few daughters there and told her she couldn't stay with them but that they would be helpful to her in finding a job. The daughters told her where to go to find a job, they gave her the address of the factory but told her not to dare say that she knows anybody there. Otherwise she couldn't get the job because they didn't allow friendships to build among the workers since they might congregate too much and then they would find out too many things. She went and they liked her, they liked the "greener" who didn't speak English because they demand less.

She got a job in a ladies' shirt factory. They were wearing those white blouses, the Gibson Girl blouses and black skirts. She worked herself up to be a forelady and was saving money. Food was provided, you didn't need more than two blouses; one to wash and one to wear, and two black skirts. Her needs were not great. Her whole thing was to save money to go back and visit her family and show them that she made it.

She found housing by a landlady. You got your packed lunch with you and you get dinner. It was room and board. At that time it was not imperative to speak English because nobody did speak English.

She never talked about her social life with men or whatever. She was telling me a lot about the things going on in the United States, especially about the conditions. She was one of the marchers for wages, demonstrated against exploitation of the workers, etc. She was telling me of the terrible fire, the Triangle Fire. She told me English lulleby's--her own versions. She was a most interesting person.

Women in the United States never asked for citizenships because they knew they would get citizenship when they got married, so they didn't bother going through that hassle. In 1914 she went back to visit in Slovakia and the World War I broke out and she couldn't go back. Not without citizenship papers. When there was no war, there was no question, you just needed the money for the ticket for the boat. Once the war broke out it was a different story. She left money, clothes, and other things back in the U.S.

She comes home to Czechoslovakia and she sees five sisters at home doing nothing and she was working her butt off in the factory doing piece work to make it. They were sitting around and having it easy. So they didn't have it so nice; they couldn't go to the movies or boat rides that she went on in summer, but she worked awfully hard to get that. Here they were sitting home nice and neatly, embroidering and surviving. She thought, 5 women sitting around, we all 6 will work together and she opened up a grocery store. It wasn't so easy as she thought. It was not that her sisters weren't able or willing to work but that it was looked down on. It was something women didn't do and people were talking.

She was telling me how when they were hanging out the laundry, there were 6 sisters and 5 long underpants. They would then put an extra pair out for my mother because she didn't wear bloomers anymore and they were ashamed that neighbors would see one pair less and realize she doesn't wear bloomers. They were afraid also that the maid would talk to other people and talk about the sister from America. Oh, she was telling more stories about those bloomers.

She made nice money and the family started living differently. What was most important was to have dowries for these 5 girls, otherwise they would never get married. They had just given up that they would ever marry. You don't marry if you don't have money and the parents were too poor. They were intelligent enough not to marry any slob that came around. They were also very good looking women. Can you imagine?

One of my aunts was married already and the whole family was crying because she had to marry a hunch back. He had money and he married her without a dowry but they felt so sorry for her that she was so poor that she had to marry a hunch back. (That was the father of Yoland. Yoland and all the children were very good looking, very bright. I think there were about 8 or 9 children and some became lawyers.) Plus she had married to another city. But that was common, being Jewish to marry a Jew you had to go to another town.

So she married off her sisters from doing well in the store. When the war was over she opened up a movie house. She didn't have it too long though because when the government was established, the rules were that everything that belonged to the government had to go to war veterans. That included tobacco, salt, movie houses, theatres that now belonged to that State. So she had to give it up. I assume she was compensated but not much. Especially at that time, they just confiscated and that's that. But they were trying to create positions and jobs for war veterans.

Then she felt it was time she got married herself. She put out the word. She had two sisters married in Koschiska (Yoland and Aladar's mothers). She put out the word that she wants to marry a handsome man. Well, she got a handsome man for money. He came into a very well paying store on the main street but he was not right to manage stores. He was very well liked by women and he was very generous with credit to the women. My mother said for a little pinch and a little hug the women didn't have to pay the bill. It never went farther than that but it was enough that the store went to ruins.

She figured if she went to another city that wouldn't be so influenced from the neighbors, family, being known, maybe they could start again. They sold that store they had and went to Zvolen. That was already in the depression, you could start to feel it. Must have been 1925. They went to another city and opened another store and the same thing happened. Then my father went as a store manager to Moravia which was quite far, especially if you have to take trains to get there.

My father's name was Eugene Frisch. He was born in 1892 and was younger than my mother by about 5 years. But my mother wasn't young when she got married. They were married in 1921 and I was about three or four years old when they moved to Zvolen. I don't know how long that store lasted, I didn't go to school there so it couldn't be that long. I went to school when we moved to Moravia.

He managed a shoe store in Moravia. Then after their store was liquidated, she moved out there with me. What actually happened was that my mother figured that there was something fishy going on. He was too happy there and never talked about we should come out there and join him. So one day she picked herself up and went to visit him and we arrived in the wee hours. My mother opens the door and another woman is in the bed with my father. So he had a live-in girlfriend. My mother threw out the girlfriend and moved in. She went back to Zvolen, liquidated that store and said her marriage was more important than having a run down store. By that time they found a nice apartment and he was working in a store.

The depression was on. The store closed but not on his account this time. The people who owned the store closed it. My mother started to sew at home. She went to factories that were around there and asked them for piece work to bring home. Of course she got the idea from when she was living in America. She went to them and told them she couldn't come to work at their place because she had a child but that if they would give her the work to take home, she was a sewing machine, she has the know-how and they should try it out. And that's what she did. I remember she was sewing buttons on things. My father was taking it there and bringing it back. I don't know what they were doing, I think garter belts. I know that my mother figured out that putting lots of thread in one needle, like 3 or 4 threads that she had enough going just once up and down with the tread and it looked like it was sewn so many times and my father was threading the needle, something like that.

I remember he was not a good provider, never was. He was very liked and was very charming and a good dresser, well groomed. One of these Hungarian womanizers. The Hungarians are very good at it, they're just

like the Italians that way. He had lots of charm and he adored me, he loved me. He made my mother miserable though. She had a miserable life with him.

Where they lived, my mother got very friendly with the landlady, they were like another grandparents. They were Czech and were very good to us and helped us have a piece of bread. Then my father found a job as a salesman for a sausage factory in Moravia. But they wanted him to take the Slovak territory. So we moved back to Kremnica and he was traveling as a traveling salesman for a sausage factory. There were new people and we got an apartment and lived there. He came home on weekends and always brought home some nice things for me.

He brought pictures to show my mother of other women. And he always was saying "My wife is so understanding, she enjoys it when I show her these pictures." My mother talked Hungarian so that I wouldn't understand her and as much as I didn't understand Hungarian, I understood when she was talking to her friends about how much it hurt her. She put on a nice smile so that he shouldn't think he's such a big shot. But it hurt her. I always felt sorry for her, she always had a tough life, very tough. She was a good looking woman but not lucky with men. I think she was for that time, too independent. She was not that meek woman, not at all, she was independent and men don't know how to cope with that.

Life was going on. We lived close to my aunt and grandmother. When we moved back to Kremnica I had a very nice life for a few years. I had my grandmother and aunt and cousins. I was going to school, I must have been 7 or 8 years old. I liked going to my grandmother's because there were always lots of children on the street to play with. The street was more a side street and not in the middle of town. It was nice to stay there, nice warm bed and all. I don't know why grandmothers have that certain feeling. She had many grandchildren but I liked it there.

With one of my cousins, I was very, very close. He was about a year or two older than me. He was a shy boy and we got very friendly. I remember even our parents were concerned about that relationship because they didn't want cousins to get too attached to each other. So in summer I was sent away to an aunt for a vacation, you know, I had so many aunts.

One day my parents went out in the evening, to some kind of show or party. The next day my father left to go to the train on his route and at the first station they called my mother to tell her that he died. They brought him back to the city and there was the funeral. We were sitting shiva in my aunt's house because her house was bigger and more convenient. My 12th birthday was at my aunt's house while we were sitting shiva.

I remember my aunt was an aunt through marriage and I helped out in their store when it was market day. They were very nice and I always got nice gifts for my birthdays. It was their son who I was so friendly with because we were growing up together, going to movies on Saturday afternoons and things. When my father died and we were at her house, which was my second home away from home, she gave me a pair of shoes as a gift that were out of style. Then I realized what happened - I am an

orphan! If the shoes were given to me a year before, alright, but now I thought it was because I was an orphan. It really hit me. I remember those shoes even now, terrible. Over the years you make it worse, you know how that is.

Then after that my mother decided to open a dairy store on the corner where she found a closed store that had been a warehouse. She rented it and cleaned it out and painted it and built in it. She was delivering milk to people's homes with rolls which we had delivered to us from the baker. We had a girl delivering them -- the whole town was very small. You don't have that many people with that luxury, usually they sent their maids to the farmer. But she made a new idea of "delivery" to get customers. That was her American know-how and bringing in a completely new concept. She was selling in the store everything that was dairy; cheeses, milk, sour milk (that's like buttermilk) and sour cream, brinza, etc.

My grandmother was getting too old to live alone in that house where she lived before. My grandfather died when I was small and they had closed up the tavern for some time. She moved in with us in an apartment close by to the dairy shop. We had nice two rooms with a porch and small kitchen. We didn't need a bigger kitchen because we had a kitchen next to the store. There is where we spent our days, in the store. We did everything in the store and just went to the apartment to sleep. We had a maid because having the store we needed somebody and she stayed with us and had her own room. But we three women only stayed in the one room, it was much warmer that way. Grandmother was good to me. She didn't have any teeth and was scraping apples before she could eat them. She was always sitting and scraping apples. But she was a big help in the kitchen because we were baking and selling baked goods. People were eating there kuchens that they could eat with coffee or milk. My mother baked very good bread for the people who ate there. It wasn't for take-out sale.

It was five years that I know she had that store. She made out a very nice living from it. She started from scratch, she saved money, she saved all the money for the passage to Israel. She paid for passages for three people, she provided new linens, two sets of everything; one for her and one for me. She spent all that money because she wanted to take goods out and she found ways of how to do it.

She had a duty police come into our house and was watching us packing so he could see what we were putting in and that way it wouldn't have to be opened again at the borders. It was quite expensive to have an official come in and do that. But it was all her ideas. She got the contacts, she found the trip, she went to other cities to talk to people and get the information of how to get out of the country. She put everything into how to get out of the country because she knew what was happening. She begged her brothers and sisters; they're only answer was "We didn't harm anybody, why should they harm us?" "What could happen to us, we were good to them. Wouldn't any of my maids take me to their homes? I gave my shirt for them, they would do the same for me. Didn't I give her money so she could get married, didn't I give her a dowry? Look there

isn't a holiday she doesn't come into my house and let me see her family, they'll take me in." But that's what happens, people forget.

How I felt in my youth, I had friends but not too many because it was already in that time. Little by little you lose them because of the political situation. Even the maid that we had that was with us many years came with tears in her eyes asking us to forgive her but that she has to leave us because she was forced into it. They came to her and told her that she has to leave us. But she said she would help us in any way. So then I started to deliver milk but then less and less people wanted it from us.

When my mother had milk delivered, it was from the station of the town which was up on hill, far away, a 20 minute bus ride to come in. The milk came on the station and we had a boy or someone with a truck bring the milk to us. It was delivered from another town. Then they didn't want to do that for us anymore either. We had an institute of deaf people, the main Czech deaf institute in our town. They encouraged the young people to work and we always hired from there; then they stopped that too. They didn't want to work for the Jew. It was getting more and more difficult.

One of my very good friends was the daughter of the principal of that school. I always went to her house and she always came to my house. They had a dress making department at the school and that was where my mother had her dresses made and mine. One day I came to the door to say hello and play with my friend and was told "I'm sorry but you can't come in. My parents told me I cannot play with you anymore." That was the end. And you find another friend, and the same thing happened. Then there were Jehova Witnesses, they were rare but there were some and I got friendly with one of the girls because we were both outcasts. I was more of an outcast than she was because then her parents were worried that through me they would have more problems so that was out.

That was the time my mother took me out of school. I didn't finish the last year. I think it was obligatory till 14 years old. Then I went to the dressmaker for a jiffy course on dress making. My mother paid her very handsomely just for her to teach me the basic construction and putting together of a dress.

That was the time I met your father because I had to pass him on the way to go to the dressmaker. I learned to sew and my mother was getting all the papers together. It was a very lonely life when all your friends leave you. My uncle took in one of the cousins in his store to make it easier on the family - one of the brothers of Yoland. He came to Kremnica and was living there and actually was the one who started the Zionist organization because he brought it from another city. He showed us a little know-how. It was a very good place for us to meet, the Jewish young people. There were not too many of us because not too many Jews lived there. Usually when they got older, they left the town and went someplace else.

A year after my father died my favorite cousin, my friend, died. He had a heart enlargement. I remember my aunt went to the bigger city with him

to the doctors, to a hospital and there he died. That was a very big loss for me. Well, they didn't have to worry that I would marry him.

When I was born, they discovered my mother had T.B. and they suggested that she should go to a climate like northern Italy and get away from me so I shouldn't get it. So she went to northern Italy to a sanatorium where she got cured. The only trouble is that every time she went for X-rays she had to convince them it was only a scar tissue. But everything was fine. She was in Italy and travelled a little so she knew about Italy and Venice. She brought everybody in my family that marble ball or ashtray with little doves around it from Venice. She always told us how in Italy she went to churches in different cities and what do you see? Nobody praying, but everybody was talking, all the women. She always wondered why nobody was praying. Well, you don't have to pray when you're in Italy. She liked the sanatorium and then she came back.

Meanwhile when I was a baby I stayed with my aunt Serena, from my uncle Willy's wife. They were the richer aunt and uncle, they lived in the better part of town. So if anything happened, or whatever, she took over and provided. She always invited people for dinners. As a matter of fact, when we left Czechoslovakia, my grandmother went to live with her. As rich as they were (in my eyes) they never travelled or went on vacations, or owned a house. They got a nicer apartment and paid more rent, but still. When anybody came to visit, they stayed over there. They had the money but were not anxious to go places, to see things. My mother couldn't understand it, she would have gone places.

But my aunt was very happy to be a housewife and make nice table clothes and set a nice table. She had a mastectomy when her second child was born, shortly after, so she must have been a young woman. I know she had awfully swollen arm. But she didn't die from cancer. It was never talked about, it was a big whisper. I never could figure out why she had a swollen arm until I got my mastectomy. She always had special coats made. Not that they had many ready-made coats but my uncle had a few ready-made coats in his store but she couldn't wear them because of her arm. You know, cancer at that time was not talked about and if you died they would not say why.

I only knew your father only for a few months. My mother always had a tradition to invite someone, especially a man, to Passover Sedar. We were three women and she wanted to have a man at the table to conduct the services. She invited two soldiers; Belo and another man. I just remember one thing - your father took over the whole conversation; nobody else spoke, he was the most interesting person. I still have that when we go places, he takes over the conversation, he's interesting. But if you don't show any interest in somebody else, you're no longer interesting but over-powering.

He was courting me and was the only "man" that cared for me and I felt very flattered that an "older" man of knowledge and of so much experience -- he left home at 16, had lived at a Hachshara, he was very politically minded and very involved and was sharing all his ideas with me. I was most flattered that he picked me out from all the women that he knew. He was 24 and left home at 16. He was in the army for 2 years. But I got

married to him, not because of all that flattery but more because of my mother's understanding that it would be very convenient for us to have a man with us while we would be traveling. She provided for all the documents for him to leave the army, to go on the trip with, clothing, everything.

He didn't have anything. His parents were older and when you come out from the army you don't have anything. So, I bought myself a husband, literally (he sold himself). It was completely to his advantage too. When you belong to a Hach Sharah, it comes your time of training and then you leave your country to go to Israel. His group left but he couldn't join them because he got into the army so his chances of going to Israel legally were gone; through war and through losing his standing in the group.

When he went to Israel a few years ago, he went to visit his Kibbutz (each Hach Sharah becomes a kibbutz) and met a couple of people still alive, he visited with them and so on.

It was unheard of that a 17 year old girl got married without being pregnant. At City Hall you have to put out an announcement that there will be a marriage of that and that person, so if there is anybody against it, they should let it be known. It hangs there for a week. So everybody come to my mother expressing their sympathy. They said "Oh, you worked so hard to raise the child and look what happened, she has to get married." Then my mother was explaining to them that I didn't HAVE to get married, but it was also my family, they all thought that I was pregnant. Who's crazy enough to get married at 17? Especially in Europe you don't get married so young. In the Jewish religion the Orthodox do because in order not to have sexual experience before you get married and a young man has to have a younger girl, so you got married young. But if you were not religious you didn't get married so early and they tried to discourage early marriages.

I wouldn't have gotten married so young. I wanted to have experience of life; I wanted to live and enjoy and see and do. I got from my mother the desire to see what's on the other side of the mountain. I always encouraged you too to go some place and to travel. My mother was always dreaming for me a very good life, an exciting life, always telling me stories and of what she expects from me, "You'll leave this city as soon as high school is over and go to a big city." For that reason she wanted me to visit Prague and experience it when I was younger.

When my mother was widowed, she sent me to different family members and I spent summers in different places to that I could travel and have different experiences. I travelled by myself. She was encouraging of me to go on trips and change trains, things like that. It was a big thing to go and change trains and go to another country like Hungary where I didn't know the language.

I went to a seance meeting once in Bari. I was invited by my dressmaking teacher. I never say "no" to anything and I went and my cousin "came". He said he was my cousin (spirit) but I couldn't communicate with him

because he spoke in Hungarian. Now that I'm thinking about it, I didn't speak Hungarian but as a spirit, can't he speak any language?

Anyways, my mother had such plans for me to get into business and social worlds, out of that small town environment and to be a modern woman. I came from a town that had lots of tourists coming, but still, I was too young for anything like that. At 17 a European girl, even an American girl in 1938 was still a big child. The children grow up faster now - since television. You experience things through television that you wouldn't never experience in a lifetime; it just opened up so much to you.

We got married and we went to Italy and I tell you that story. It was then that I realized that I am married. We were with a group of people young people, socializing, and at once your father said it was time for us to leave and go to bed. But I wanted to stay and have more fun with the young people. Well, I realized then that I didn't have a choice any more, I was a married woman now. Well, I got all my traveling in and I'm still ready to travel more. America was good for us and thank God for San Diego. It was the best thing that ever happened to us. The life is easier than in Cleveland, all the rigidity of dress and neighbors is all gone. It's a freer lifestyle here. I guess I'm the one that's changed. When I came out here I said, I don't want what I had out there in Cleveland, that I had to make a list so I shouldn't repeat what I was serving for dinner or what I was wearing when I entertained. Now, if they don't like it, they don't have to come. I changed. And I had the opportunity to change here because I met new friends that feel the same way.

My mother was a smart woman, she didn't interfere in my marriage; when we had a fight she walked out. And when you think that we were all in one room for most of our married life through immigration and wherever; in the hotel, in Brendisi, with Mrs. Trillo - can you imagine, all in one room. You know, sex wasn't so easy we just got under the blankets and she made like she was sleeping and I never groaned for fear of making any noise.

The relationship between my mother and my husband was a very close one. He respected her very much and she respected him. They talked over everything together and we never made any decisions without asking my mother. She was included in every decision. Why? Because she was a smart woman. But you know it was me that was left out. I was treated like a child and what does a child know. I stayed a child according to my husband till today, he still thinks I'm a child. Maybe till 84 years old. But she was very resourceful and had all these ideas of how to make ends meet. She taught me how to make a meal from one potato.

Actually she never liked to cook, she was a business woman. She left the cooking over to my grandmother, to the maid, to anyone as long as she could get out of the kitchen. But when it came time to make a living out of it, she was there to do it. She was the one who had the idea to cook for more people because it would be cheaper for us when you cook for more. Cooking? It was soup. I don't remember ever having had meat or

chicken except for holidays. It was most vegetables, pasta and potatoes, things like that.

When we lived in Italy from the beginning our cooking was more Slovak than Italian because you have to get used to it, especially during the war they only had such terrible smelling oil, it was black oil. It was the third grade of the third grade of oil. We got adjusted. The more you live with the Italians, the more you do their way. She loved Pizza. When we came back in the evening from a walk and brought her back pizza, she didn't mind getting up 3:00 in the morning for it. She was fun. People liked her. She always had nice stories to tell and she always had lady friends and she loved to play cards.

I remember as a child we were in Moravia while my father was still managing the shoe store, before the bad times came, she was hardly there a few months when she had her circle of card players. They didn't play cards at home, they went to the cafe houses, they went for lunch and played cards. She always told me, "after school, you come and meet me at the cafe," and then we walked home together. So she enjoyed her life, she made the best of it, the best she knew how.

In Kremnica, I still feel guilty about this, she was widowed and she had a suitor. He was a pretty handsome man and she asked me what I thought of him. I said, Oh mother, how could you get married to something like that?" First I was 14, what do I know? I was afraid of losing my mother to a strange man. I'm thinking of it often, if her life might not have been so much easier if she married somebody. For that I'm always telling women who complain that their daughters are upset about their marriage that they shouldn't be upset and that their daughters will get adjusted. That they should do what they want to do and not what their daughters, or sons, or in-laws want them to do. I really hope she did what she really wanted to do. I really hope so. I remember that man came from another town and stayed in a hotel in order to get acquainted with my mother. He came into the store a few times a day. Oh, I don't know, she was too independent.

That good relationship between my mother and husband lasted till the last day of her life. He was very respectful. He never made her feel that she lives with us but that we lived with her. When we were working we brought the paychecks to her. She took it to the bank, she cashed it, she paid the bills. When the decisions came up to buy a car, we sat around the table and started to count, can we or can't we? Because when you come to this country you don't have charge accounts; you don't believe in charge accounts. You pay cash and if you don't have cash you don't buy it. And I think your father wishes he could still do that today. When I used to go to buy something at the May Co., he'd say, "don't charge it, just pay cash," so our charge accounts were closed because of disuse. We got our first charge account because we wanted to buy our own house and had to establish credit. But we promised ourselves we won't buy anything and thought that if you can't pay for it, you don't need it. Maybe now credit is thought of differently in Europe too.

When we came to Cleveland and she still had her angina, she went to the hospital. They put her on a diet and she lost lots of weight and was not

allowed to go around. But she couldn't sit home. I was working and you were in school so she went social working. She went and helped out ladies like Donna at the government offices, to help them with the telephone, offices, helping with their bills, private volunteering like that. Donna was a widow who came to Cleveland from Yugoslavia. My mother felt obligated to help her out in making applications for things, to family service to interpret for her, to help her find an apartment, that kind of thing. My mother had all these ladies that she was doing this for. It was her own social work. She always saw to it that she should be home when I got home but I would see traces of lipstick or I would say, "mother what happened, you forgot to take off the other earring."

It was not that we didn't want her to do these things, but it was not good for her health. Her doctor was always telling her not to run around but she was not the kind of person to sit at home. She came home from the hospital and was supposed to stay in bed. Someone was coming to visit her so she went out on the porch. We lived on the second floor, the same porch where Raymond fell down, to lean out to see if her friends were coming. The night before it rained and the porch cracked and she fell off the porch onto the ground. Luckily she first fell on a tree and then to the ground. She broke her leg. I'm working in a store and they call to tell me my mother is in the hospital. First I said, "Well, how come you come home from the hospital and are supposed to be in bed and then you go out and break your leg?"

She was so upset, she was 58 or so at that time and was very active. She belonged to the Golden Agers and liked to go there and socialize. She took buses everywhere and got around. Even being sick, she had a pleasant life, she wasn't deprived. I was working so we had someone coming in to help clean. I hardly went into the kitchen, we just didn't get along there. She wasn't glad to be there either so there was lots of friction. I cooked when we had company, we did do things together like that.

She was just a great person. I learned everything from her in terms of philosophy and attitudes towards life.

ORIGINAL -
CONTINUED
FROM blue folder

BELO GROTT

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

I was born in Velke Chlievany, Banovce N-B, Austrio-Hungarian Monarchy, later known as Czechoslovakia, in 1916. It was during the First World War and my father was for four years in the Austrio-Hungarian army and came home for visits. Everytime he came home for visits there was somebody else born. My father's name was Jacob Grott, born March 30, 1872, my mother was Matilda Stern born June 29, 1880. Then my brother Eugene was born September 29, 1903; my sister Bertha was born January 24, 1905; my sister Helen was born June 25, 1908; my brother Julius was born January 18, 1910. Zigmund was born in 1912 but died at age 17 of peritonitus. Then William was born Febreuary 20, 1914 and lastly myself on March 25, 1916.

My father had a tavern and grocery store combination. After the war the government took away the tavern and gave it to war invalids. Luckily my father was four years in the war but nothing happened to him. They took it away also because he was Jewish. That was the main reason. It was in the family for centuries or almost.

We had enough land so that keeping the small grocery store and rental from the land enabled him to make a living. He worked the land only for his own consumption and that was more in the later years. The rest was rented. My mother was a housewife, had chickens and stuff but did not work in the fields. My oldest brother, Eugene, was a teacher in a Gymnasium (that's more than Junior College here). My sister Bertha was an accountant and had an important job in Bratislava by ESTA - production of tricot and was also designing stuff. My younger sister, Helena, after graduation from Gymnasium, (it was not unusual for women to go to college, they were about 50-50. It's all American propaganda that tells you baloney about women. That was true in certain places but not in Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, in many things they were more progressive than now in United States) worked in Prague and stayed there practically all her life. My brother, Julius, was an agricultural adjutant, who managed large farms. He knew how to manage large tracts; when to put the seed down, how to do it, etc. That was his work. The younger brother, William, was in business in a large general store. He was trained and was managing a pretty big store, as young as he was.

I was the youngest in the family and I went as an apprentice to learn typography as a profession at 16 years old. I went to the city for that but it was right next to the village where I was from. The city was Banovce, N-B. I worked there for four years and then continued to work there until I was in Hachsharah and then drafted into the army.

At the same time we had a very good youth group, Hashomer Hazair, a Zionist group. There we learned Jewish history and about Zionism, this was already in the 1930's when German Nazism was rising its head. As we were neighbors to Germany, we had a chance to feel and observe what was going on. I committed myself to emigrate to Israel and live a collective life on a Kibbutz. I was accepted to Hachsharah, that was the collective

where we had to work and prepare ourselves to live communally. This Hachsharah was in Presov city. I stayed there for 18 months and after that I was drafted in the army. I was 21 years old then; there they don't draft you at 18, you have to be 21. In the meantime all the other members of the group from that particular Hachsharah and others which belonged to the Kibbutz Dalet emigrated to Israel. So we were about five young men who were stuck in the Czechoslovakian army and were left behind. Now you see where my emigration to Italy and trying to get to Israel comes from. After I was released from the Army I tried through every means to get to Israel but we failed.

Going back to the question of what kind of name is "Grott"; I suspect that after the Spanish Inquisition it could have been Grotta or Grotto which means cave. Through the centuries, it was probably changed to Grott. It could have been many years back with a th, Groth. But as I remember from my father, it was always double 't'. I think it could go back to the Spanish Inquisition. In that part, that county, of Czechoslovakian there are old Jewish cemeteries with dates going back hundreds of years so it could be from that Spanish immigration to that part of Czechoslovakia.

In Czechoslovakia where I was from in Bohemia/Moravia were lots of Freemasons and free thinking people. In Slovakia, it's nearly all Catholic so there was always lots of anti-Semitism. After the World War II with the turnover, there was no such things as pogroms in that area, the people were already advanced but they went robbing. They went to the Jewish stores and took whatever they wanted. They took but they never went killing. You can't compare with Poland, Hungary, Germany. The Slovak side was more anti-Semitic than the Czech side because they were more oppressed from the Hungarians.

The Hungarians wanted to liquidate that part of the country and make it part of Great Hungary. And they tried to eliminate the people, the culture and so but they had very good poets and writers and so on that go far back in history. It's not the type of peasantry that you would find in Poland. In Czechoslovakia, illiteracy didn't exist except I remember one 90 year old woman who didn't know how to read, she was the only one. But she was smart like a whip.

Since 1933 when Hitler came to power till 1939 when Czechoslovakia went under, there was growing anti-Semitism because the Church got the power. I tell you something else, ~~Helinka~~ died, if he would have been alive that would never had happened. ~~Piso~~ became president. ~~Helinka~~ was leader of the Slovaks but would never have sided with Hitler. ~~Helinka~~ was an organizer and agitator but he never wanted to destroy, he wanted more privileges, to be on equal status with Czech side. ~~Tiso~~ was living in a big house with a Jewish lawyer and they were always very good friends, playing cards together and so on. But when the change came, he didn't even save that family. See there were 130,000 Jews in Slovakia, about 80 or 90,000 in Bohemia and Moravia. Very few saved themselves in Slovakia, they liquidated all of them. And then when somebody survived the camps, they didn't survive after. ~~Tiso~~ was a priest and after the war he was hanged because of his crimes against the people and for siding with Hitler.

What I could not understand was that both younger brothers (you see Bertha had a permit because the state needed her) but the two brothers had such good contacts with the farmers and were on such good relations, they could have saved themselves. What my friend Maurice did was escape from a camp in Poland and he went to a farmer. There was a certain religious sect, similar to the Seventh Day Adventists, and were not like the Catholics. When he escaped he didn't go home but to a farmer a few villages away who was of this sect. He put on farmer's clothing and he worked for him for nothing and they treated him with all respect. He was teaching the farmer how to make money like selling a calf on the black market, so he made money for him. He was treated well and that's how he survived till the end of the war. He just worked there in exchange for living there. My brother Julius could have done that. I remember that he was for one or two years in Bohemia managing a large estate and he could have become one of the workers in exchange for living there. He knew already what was going on.

After the occupation of Bohemia Moravia by Germany, Slovaks were sent back to Slovakia. I was in Bratislava where my sister still was working. From there I was sent (by the Army) to Kremnica where we had occupied summer resort homes. I was assigned a job to select 35 men and organize protective service of a large ammunition depot. As the anti-Semitism was already rampant I didn't have too much interest in the security of the depot so I selected Jews, gypsies and the worse elements of the army. I provided the soldiers with extra ammunition and gave the order that after dark whoever approached the compound they should shoot in the air and then direct so that all the higher ups were scared and didn't approach the compound for inspection. That gave us time to rest and not be on the watch.

During the day I had enough time to sit near a creek and observe the town and here was where I met Alice. Daily at a certain hour one girl in particular was crossing to go to the pastry shop and always I greeted her but got no answer. I found a Zionist organization in the city and their meeting place. One evening I went there and she was there. We met so I was no longer a man in a uniform but a chaver, (like a comrade). Later I met her mother and cousins. After two or three months I was transferred to the Hungarian border. I was at a command post and had plenty of time to correspond daily with Alice.

I would like to clarify how I got to Italy. I was in the army in Czechoslovakia and after the occupation of Sudenten, later in the autumn of 1939 I was in Bohemia, Moravia. Slovakia got to be an independent state. As I was from Slovakia, they sent us back to Slovakia where we had to report in the army. The army became separate. I was sent to the eastern part of Slovakia by the Hungarian border where I stayed for a few months. I was doing everything possible to get released from the army in order to emigrate. Finally I received my discharge in order to emigrate, that was May 1939.

gg: Why did they allow that?

lg: Because I was Jewish, they wanted us to emigrate, they didn't care for us. After I was discharged, later in July I got married: July 26,

1939. We tried to emigrate right away to Italy. This was the only way we had a chance to get out in order to attach ourselves to the transport which was supposed to go from Brendisi, Italy to Haifa, Israel. According to the new regulations of the Slovakian government, we had a chance to take only money corresponding to 1,600 lire per person as tourists. We had to declare on all our papers to Italy that we are tourists, and we had to dress accordingly with knapsacks, boots, to look like tourists. That was the reason we didn't have money to stay longer a time in Italy where we got stuck.

ITALY

I want to start at Venice where we stopped there to change the train and where we didn't have any Italian money with us but we wanted to have some coffee. An Italian gentleman approached us and he paid for us to have coffee. That was our first taste of Italian hospitality. From there we went to Milan where we got together with the rest of the group who were leaving the country, at a hotel and stayed there for three days.

BRENDISI

After that we went to Brendisi which is in southern Italy, a port. In that port we were supposed to embark but the ship didn't arrive. In the meantime the second world war started and the excuse for the Greek ship was that under war conditions he could back out from his deal but he kept all the money he collected for the transport. Now we were stuck there in a hotel. We didn't have money or any other means to live there or pay the hotel. We started to send SOS telegrams to Jewish organizations in Switzerland. After a couple of weeks came some delegation from an office in Genova and bailed us out from the Hotel. But in the meantime the city of Brendisi didn't allow the hotel owners to put us out in the street. It was also another act of Italian generosity until the help came.

Naturally we had no means for food. We went in the fields. It was in the time of the grape harvest for wine making. So they were throwing grapes and food to us on which we survived for the time being.

GENOVA

After, we came to Genova the Jewish community had a special office and they tried to find us housing. They were giving us 20 lire a person per week for food. This was not enough to live on and too much to die on. Later on they opened a kitchen for the group of immigrants which were stranded in Genova -- about 300 or 400 people. We were getting a plate of soup or a plate of pasta and two rolls per person. We were three people and we saved the rolls and had that for supper. Luckily later on mama got a job in the kitchen. The job was to help with the cooking. And after the dinner or lunch, whatever you want to call it, she was washing dishes and had to peel about 120 pounds of potatoes for the next day's soup, ministrone. But if they would have had to do it, it would have taken about four or five more hours, so the man of the other lady and myself came there and each one of us were peeling the potatoes. Luckily there was some oil available there so we made ourselves french fries. We had an extra something to eat.

In our arrival to Genova we were assigned housing on a street, Via Cafero, on the 6th or 7th floor slanted attic roof. We were so cold without having winter clothing that in order to keep warm we had to stay in bed or sit down in bed in order to keep our feet warm. There was no such thing as heating. Our landlord was a very nice fellow and the ladies in the kitchen were trying to help as much as they could. The kitchen was pretty long and each family was assigned one cooking charcoal burner. On the floor, we were about eight or ten families living there. Naturally we had very little money and had to eat food which we were not used to buying like baccala, dried fish, which was very cheap and marmalade made without sugar from apples.

It came to a point that I couldn't make the stairs up to the top floor, but later things changed and our condition got better at least as food was concerned. Mama also got a job in a Jewish household of very well to-do family of a furniture store owner. She was treated like a part of the family except for the work and the food. When it came to the food, she sat by the table with them. The lady of the house gave her a couple of pieces of food, the minimum that she could put on the plate and after she ate, she said "now you go back to the work" and they continued the dinner with the pastry and coffee and so on. Luckily this didn't last for a long time because we were trying to get out again through different means to get to Israel.

There was an agency which we tried to, also with a group, go to Trieste and embark there. We went to Milan and stayed there and found out later on that this ship which was to take us to Israel was denounced to the English authorities and they stopped it. So we were for the second time stranded in Milan. From there we went back to Genova and we found housing and stayed there for another three months. Then the police notified us that for the time being the men will be sent to southern Italy in special camps. There was no mention at that time what the women will do.

We got, about a week later, notification to take our belongings and go to the police station. After we were all together they brought us to the railroad stations where a whole train was especially organized to bring us to southern Italy.

In between the time we went from Milan to Genova, the Italian government declared war on the French. Naturally the French navy came close to the port city of Genova and bombarded the city. We were living on the 6th floor and every time the alarm sounded, we were supposed to go to the basement for protection. After a while we were unable to make the steps anymore due to the exceptionally good nourishment that we had at the time. So we stayed upstairs and thought that whatever will happen, will happen.

There was a very big tragedy. Where we lived there was a very big tunnel for the electric trolleys and autos and the direction of the tunnel was toward the sea. The French scored a direct hit and about six or seven thousand people lost their lives in that tunnel due to the air pressure. The bombing was going on for a pretty long period of time. And not only

was there the danger of being there, but also of being very close to the main railroad station. Fiume was the name of the railroad station.

Later on as I mentioned before, when we went to the police, they had a special train to bring us to Eboli where we were supposed to go to the camps. On the train they didn't give us the third class compartments but the second class ones. Each compartment had one Carabineiri. Naturally we had some food with us, some fruit. But these Carabineiri didn't allow us to use ours. They took lots of food with them and supplied use with food and wine for the whole trip. In Rome we had to stop and there was a committee that was waiting with a meal for every one of us.

CAMPAGNA, EBOLI

Arriving in Eboli which was the last station of our destination, late in the afternoon, buses were waiting for us to bring us to Campagna. This was a small town in the mountains where two military barracks were emptied for the refugees and civil internees to house us. There we were under the Carabineiri and also police control. We stayed in the rooms, 10 to 50 people according to the room, each with a military bunk bed with a little mattress and blanket set-up. Our food, we had to take care of ourselves. We got six lire a day and we had to provide whatever we needed. Naturally it was not enough to live on. The prices, through our arrival of 2,000 people in the military barracks in the small town, went up. It was not a very pleasant situation to be in.

After a while I got together with other gentlemen. Opposite the barracks was a little house with a small kitchen where we started to cook. I sent right away requests to grandmother for some kind of recipes which will be the cheapest and easiest way to make food. That way I was helping myself get food and also a few lires extra. I was cooking with other men for whoever was willing to spend a lire or two for some food. It was a very good idea.

After a while, the owner of the house needed the room for his family which came home from the army. We parted company but I was then hired for the police and the Carabinieri to cook for them. They supplied all the food and I was making one meal a day, the basic pasta meal for them. Naturally I had enough to eat. But they never paid me anything, even when they promised they would. This was not the main object, my interest was to have food and the work was not so hard to cook for about 10-12 people. They also had an older lady to come to wash the dishes and help out with the cleaning.

This lasted till I left Campagna. During the eight months stay in Campagna in the military barracks, we had liberty to go out in the morning after the apel (the counting of people) and had to be back by dark. Again was the counting, apel, to make sure everybody was in. The problem was that the police or Carabinieri were unable to read the names of people from twenty different countries. So one of our people was calling the names. He had such a good memory, he memorized a thousand people's names, and if he didn't see a face, he didn't call the name. So

the people who were supposed to control didn't have any idea if someone was in or not.

But I would like to stress that in this camp we had about 50 doctors, professors, lawyers, artists, and you name it, so we were not short on entertainment, courses, discussions and so on. Except that we didn't have very much means to have a better life and our freedom was restricted to only a certain area of about six square miles.

One thing I would like to mention is that in this town of Campagna, there was a Bishop. He heard that we were mostly Jewish immigrants and in this group there were some orthodox Jews and a few Rabbis, and he knew that these people do not eat any non-kosher food. So every Friday he sent bread and cheese to these people and also he was trying to be helpful in any way he was able.

As we could not get any news from the outside, he ordered from Switzerland a newspaper, the Basel Nachrichten, and gave it to us so we could read it and know what was happening from the neutral part of the world. Also, whoever had any need with the authority, he tried to help whatever way he could. The population, through the propaganda in the papers and radio, after Mussolini signed the pact with Germany, were not hostile, but not friendly.

One day we got a visit from an important person, the Nuncio Apostolico^L Borgongini Duca. He was the representative from the Vatican to the Italian government. When he came we got all assembled in front of the barracks and all the authorities from the provinces, especially the Fascist head of the police and the Podesta (the mayor) and Il Prefetto, (the prefect of the province) came with him with a very big assemblage. When the people came in masses, the first thing what he said, in Italian naturally, was "Jews are Gentlemen" and "We are all sons of one God." Pronouncing this statement, the whole approach from the population instantly changed. They did not consider us anymore as enemies but as other human beings. They had a saying for it, "Tutti siamo Christiani" "We are all human beings." And from that moment on, we had it a little bit easier with the population; if we had any need, they were much friendlier to us.

In the meantime, my wife and mother-in-law were transferred from Genova to Potenza in Luccania. They went with all the other women who were transferred to the southern part of Italy in "confino libero" to Potenza and other small towns around. They had to rent rooms with families where the government paid the rent and was also giving them certain subsidy which as I said before, was not enough to live on.

In the meantime when I was in the camp, according to the Italian law, the married people had a right to conjugal visits. The telegram came to the barracks, and during the apel the name was called, and he was told what time his wife would arrive. We were free to take an outside room and stay there without being requested to come to the barracks for the apel. Now, the police in Potenza were very liberal in counting the days of

mama's departure and arrival. So usually from the three day visit we made out of it a whole week.

According to the Italian set-up, families with small children or pregnant women were not divided. Only the man who was married without children or were not married, were in the camp. I was told from one of the Italian doctors that he could help me get united with my family. He gave me a certificate that I am sick and I need personal care. I then had to go to Solerno to the province doctor. When I arrived there, the doctor looked on the certificate and looked at me and asked me how long I was married. When I told him I was married ten months, he said, "Yes sir, you are sick and you need personal care." Within 84 hours I was transferred from Campagna to Potenza to live with my family.

POTENZA

My wife and mother-in-law were living by a family in a housing project for war veterans. This lady was blind and had two daughters and four sons of which two were in the army and the others were 13 and 16 years old. She was a widow and intuitively intelligent. She tried to be helpful as she could. She was also on a very restrictive budget. But on Sunday, the most important day for the Italian family, she always sent us a big platter of pasta that we should have a better meal at least once a week. Naturally, as the Italians are raised, that meal was meant for the man.

Later on we started to look for some kind of work to supplement our meager income. We were about 60 or 70 families in that city and some of our friends were suggesting to Alice that she should do some sewing. We had a machine from the landlady in our room and Alice took apart a blouse and according to the old model, she started to put together new blouses and skirts and clothing. Withing a short time she was an expert dressmaker. She sewed for all the noble families in Potenza.

I had started to do dry cleaning. We bought some chemicals and studied a little bit about it from books. My main specialty was raincoats which in that town, there was no one able to do, they had to send it to Solerno to a cleaner there. Meanwhile we branched out to a different field. Alice and grandma started to knit. This was an area of lots of sheep and the peasants were making their own wool by hand. We bought skeins of wool, washed it thoroughly and dyed it. Before you know, we were the experts in town on dying wool and mama hired some ladies, also from the other families in the house. She made the models, the patterns and they were knitting. Each one had to knit different parts; one makes sleeves, the other fronts, like piece work. Mama put it together with a lining and sold the coats, sweaters, skirts, whatever.

We had report daily by the police. We had to get dressed and walk a mile and a half to the police station and then back, this was too much of a waste of time. So in order not to be disturbed, I approached the sergeant of the police department who was in charge of the register. I told him, naturally with outstretched hand, we would like to not come to sign if there was some way. He gave me a piece of paper with 30 or 31 days according to the number of days in the month and we signed for that many days ahead. We gave him some nice present. Now we didn't have to come to the police and had more time to work.

In the same time the war was going on full speed and shortages on food and other necessities was acute. But in the time we were in Potenza we made contacts with grocery stores, bakery store, so that if we need essentials, we always got it. Although we had special ration coupons for all the food like sugar, pasta, bread and so on, when I went shopping (which was my department) the ladies never asked me how many coupons I had but asked me how much bread I wanted, or sugar, or flour. They liked me. That way we were able to supply many families their basic food, especially bread which was very scarce. When I went to the bakery, and the lady asked me how much bread I wanted, and I carried four or five loaves of bread away, the other people looked around and asked how come she gave us so much bread. She started to yell at them that they don't have any right to complain, we are strangers in town and don't have any family so we cannot depend on anybody to bring us food from the countryside. That was the way they approached us in every respect, even at the market, or butcher, or groceries, we were always treated like privileged people.

When the German Afrika Corps went through Italy to Africa, they stopped in Potenza and confiscated all the hotels for their officers and main command. The police, three weeks before they arrived, notified us and told us it would be better if we moved out to the provinces, the small towns and villages in the mountains and so that we would be out of sight of the Germans. They provided us with bus tickets to go and select a town where we wanted to go stay and gave us transportation to disappear from the city. When the Germans came in, there were no immigrants in the place, and nobody reported to the Germans that there were some before.

It happened in one village that somehow the Germans got notice from somebody that there were some Jews, Hebraea, in that town. There were about six or seven families. When the German came to the police, the police chief notified some of the policemen and told them to go right away to tell these families to run in the woods in the mountain. He then tried to prolong the discussion with the Germans and tried to hold them up for a few hours to give the people time to escape. In the meantime he hid the registration papers of the immigrants. So when they asked, he said, "What immigrants? We have nobody here." The Germans had to go because they didn't find anybody. This was the action of the Italians.

CORLETTO PERTICARA

Our landlady in Potenza had a sister-in-law living in a town called Corletto Perticara. That sister-in-law lived in Solerno and had this house empty so she was glad to rent this house. It even had a toilet

because the husband stayed in America and was sending money. Probably he had another wife and family in the United States. He was sending money for his daughters to go to school, one of them to a college. He never showed up in town but it was known as the home of the Americano. We had pretty nice housing considering the area. We also had water in the basement; there was a well there.

In this town we met other people from different places, also some political internees, Italians. The same thing was happening there. Mama was already a good dressmaker and the two daughters of the mayor (Podesta) right away came in to get their dresses made, but as the mayor he didn't expect to have to pay but this was the start. When other people saw that the mayor's daughters and mayor's wife came, so naturally they came also. And that was the start of a little work.

I met there one man who was a furrier and used to work in Milano but originally was from Russia. We started to figure out how to make fur coats. In this town there were tremendous amount of goats and sheep, the sheep had to be dyed but the goats had a natural color. We made a friend of one butcher and told him we wanted to buy some of these furs from him. When he was ready, after spring, in Easter when they usually kill the small young goats, still milk fed and the fur is beautiful and shiny, we tried to select the colors to match so we didn't have to dye them--such experts we were not. But tanning we could do, we just tried to learn it. We selected several pelts which matched and were tanning them and also did all the stretching necessary to make them soft. Mama made us a model, a pattern, for a ladies' coat and we cut and sewed it together by hand because there were no such things as furrier machines. I know how to sew pretty well. Mama put a lining in. As I had some contacts in Potenza with the police department, I requested a travel order from the police so I could come to Potenza.

In Corletto there is agriculture and lots of olive trees so there was big production of olive oil. I again made a contact with some of the people for a few cigarettes to get oil. The Secretariat of the Potenza Police asked me what I could bring him because they was starving in the city. I told him if he sent me the trip ticket I would bring him some food. So naturally he sent a telegram to the Carabinieri that I have to present myself to the police on day so and so. Meanwhile I was trying to pack as much food as I could put together; butter, cheese, oil, flour, etc.

Every arriving bus was controlled and inspected so the police chief sent two policemen to the bus station to wait for me and before the inspectors could come, they stepped in and took my luggage and took me. We went to the police so the inspectors couldn't interfere. I come to the Commissaria and the first thing he asked me was, "What did you bring me?" So I gave him a wink, then we went to his private room, unpacked what I brought for him. And for my friends and to sell to make the difference I had the coats. So I was able to bring the coats to the city and sell them with official sanction. He didn't even look at the other luggage, he just wanted to know what I brought him. I brought him a couple gallons of oil, some cheese and eggs and he was in seventh heaven.

Coming back to the police department of Potenza, I must say only the best. They behaved very humanely and civilized. When some order came from the government, from Rome, the Secretariat sent for me and asked me "What shall we do about it?" So naturally he had the right person to consult. And then he said "Between them and me is Chemari, is a Sea, I could put it right away into effect whatever they want, or I don't have to, I have time. This is not my type of order which I like to fulfill." When the war finished I did everything to protect this man because he was not fascist in that sense but a great humanitarian.

I went out from the police with my luggage and distributed some of the food to my Italian friends which I got acquainted with during our sojourn and they were very happy to receive some food which was not available in the city. The fur coats I sold in a couple of hours because there was nothing like that to be had.

When I got back three days later to town, the Carabinieri did not know what purpose I went to Potenza for and they were very much, not afraid, but they didn't know where they stood; if I had some connection with the police, if I would do anything against them. So they were very polite to us and we could do whatever we wanted and they never bothered us.

In the meantime we met some of these Italian political prisoners and particularly one gentleman, Ettore Verma. He was from Torino, alone, and he attached himself to us and we got to be very good friends. We went for walks and had very interesting discussions. He used to be, many years back, in America for 10 or 15 years. But he didn't like it very well and came back and was working for a big steel company as a representative for the Austrian government to Italy for steel imports.

This was already the time when the war was raging in Africa and the retreat of the Germans from Africa in the spring of 1943. Daily hundreds of American B-29 planes were coming overhead and went to bombard Italian cities. One day as they were coming, they started to drop bombs on this little town. Luckily we had everything prepared to run, we had our knapsack, blankets and some essentials always ready if we had to run out of the house. We felt a shaking motion and so knew a couple hundred planes were coming. We grabbed our things and run out and as we cross the street the bombers came over and destroyed the house where we lived.

We weren't a half a mile from where the bomb fell and destroyed everything when Mr. Verma came running up to us with his face white as snow and was unable to talk. After a while we calmed him down and asked what happened. The bomb came through the roof where he was living and onto the bed where he was sitting. As they were beds with springs, the bomb did not explode. He stayed with us and we went to the mountains together.

The first night we couldn't go too far and stayed in a little wooded area and bombs were coming down around us like hail. The next morning we continued to the mountains and there an Italian peasant woman was carrying two large round breads like wheels and looked at us six or so people and said "Where are you going?" We never saw this lady before but she recognized that we were foreigners, "stragnieris--that's what they

called us foreigners; she took one bread down from her head, took a big knife and gave us a chunk, nearly half of that bread. She had salt with her so she gave us some of the salt also. That salt she gave us, if she would have sold it at that time she could have gotten gold for it because salt was not available. Again it proves the kind of goodness of the Italian simple people.

We arrived in a wooded area where some farm was around. There was an empty barn with hay and straw and so we stayed there. Naturally we didn't have any food but we got some flour from a farmer and a little bit of yeast, starter. Outside there was a big oven where farmers baked bread but it was all abandoned. We collected some wood and baked bread and who was doing it? Me. The bread came out and it was the most marvelous and best bread we ever ate because we were hungry.

When the bombardment calmed down several days later, we went back and the Germans were in retreat already. But in the house where we used to live the bombs destroyed all the upper floors but the basement was in pretty good shape, it was covered. What we did, the other family and us, we got a huge Italian bed and the two sets of families all slept in the one bed. We were waiting for the so-called liberators.

First came the Canadians, Australians, British and then the American troops. My mother-in-law spoke some English so we went out and looked for some English speaking officers. Luckily as we stood outside, one Colonel passed by and we approached him. Luckily he spoke Italian also. His name was Colonel Howell. He asked who we are and we told him we were Czechoslovakian citizens and were here as civil internees. He asked what he could do for us. We told him that we would like to go back to Potenza where we used to live for a few years already and we had contact there and we couldn't stay in this town. He promised he would send us a truck to pick us up and he selected a Jewish driver who spoke Yiddish so that he should be able to communicate with us. He told me we should be ready on a certain day. But we took it very skeptically. You see, with war and so on we didn't believe he would really send a truck. But we were ready at that time anyways; we didn't have much to carry because everything was destroyed.

POTENZA

That appointed day, exactly on the hour a driver came with a truck, we went up with the other family, the Ephraimsons (they later went on the Oswego transport). He picked us up and brought us back to Potenza. Naturally we couldn't go back to the old place where we used to live because Mrs. Trillo had that rented and her sons had came back. But again with a contact we found very quickly a place to stay. Then mama got back her old clientele and I worked with the AMGOT, the Allied Military Government whose function was to establish civilian governments in an orderly manner in the cities that the armies passed through so there wouldn't be big problems.

So did Mr. Verman. He worked in the office as a typist. It took him five hours to type a letter but he did it. He was a very nice fellow.

He was also eating with us. He got used to mama's cooking. So this was back in Potenza.

Naturally the hatred against the fascist from some anti-fascist people were great but only when they were safe and knew that nobody would punish them. Mostly personal vendettas came to surface, not for political but personal reasons. The two officers, the English Major and American Captain of course didn't know the Italian intrigues so I told him, "Look you have to be very careful not to make hasty decisions because this is not normal political struggles, this is a lot of personality things but I can vouch for these people here in the police and the Prefect." I told them the stories of how they treated us and so on. So they stayed on in their offices.

By this time we were able to go into public places, in cafe houses and so on. On the public plaza were the police and Prefecto were standing, opposite was a big cafe and office building. As we were already in a better financial situation as well as all around, we went to the cafe for coffee and the Sr. Prefecto and the chief of police came and kissed the hand of mama. It was already a different thing, she was already a lady and no longer the immigrant. Our relations continued to be very good to the last minute of our stay in Italy.

Something else I would like to mention. The doctor in Potenza. When we needed medical attention we didn't have to go to any welfare agency doctor, because the doctor came to us in our house without pay as a friendly gesture. The hospital in Potenza was bombed and destroyed. When you were to be born, the doctor didn't want mama to go to the hospital because there wasn't good enough hygiene and facilities to deliver. He said "why don't you take the mid-wife and I am available any time you would need me but you are better off in your own house where it's more sterile and from every point of view." So Gemma was born in the living room with a mid-wife. I went 3:00 a.m. to call her and she said she'd be over at 6:00 when I told her the symptoms. You were born around 7:00 or something like that.

I had a very good friend, a professor at the Gymnasium which in Europe is more than American high school. One day I'm sitting in the cafe drinking my espresso when he comes excited, screaming and yelling. He had just been in the church and came to me saying, "You know how imbecile the priest must be, he is preaching that the Jews killed our God, Jesus Christ. Doesn't he know the history, that we Romans killed him? I wonder that still in this age people are spreading this kind of nonsense."

During the work with AMGOT we had also transportation assignment. The officers' concern was mostly to bring in food but to the southern Italian, food without wine doesn't go. They were coming and begging constantly for an assignment of a train of cars to bring wine from Bari and parts of the wine region. The two officers were always laughing and saying they were crazy Italians to want wine. I told them that I bet that if they do not do something about it they would have a riot on their hands. I explained to them that it was important to have wine as part of their diet. Finally they agreed to an assignment of two cars which

brought several thousand gallons of wine. And there were big festivities and compliments to the Americanos for being so understanding for bringing the wine. So then I looked at them and said, "Now you see."

When the army passed through and stayed for a while in Potenza, especially the Australian and Canadians and Americans, not the English, not being used to drinking wine, started to drink and got very drunk and started to destroy the bars, cafe houses, etc. And they were molesting women. The next morning they found several soldiers with cut throats. So they started to inquire and asked how it could happen? I explained to them that the Italian will protect his women regardless of what the cost; they are not used to rape and molestation. I suggested they put an off-limits sign to the soldiers at these bars. First they won't get drunk and secondly, you will have peace. Finally through persuasion, they found out I was right. They put out the off-limit signs and there was peace with no more problems and after that there was nice relations between the army and the population. And they were trying to be helpful wherever they could.

In 1944 we were notified that there will be a transport of immigrants from Italy to the United States; 1,000 people would have permits to come to the U.S. We and many of our friends were selected. But the first question we asked "is it permanent or temporary?" When the official told us it was temporary for the duration of the war and after that we have to return to our country of origin, we declined. We had no interest in coming to the U.S. and then coming back to Europe. We were already liberated in Italy and our existence was secure. Many of our friends went because they didn't have anything to lose or any other way to get out.

Our intention was still to go to Israel. Later on it came to be that also a thousand people were selected for Israel. We had a chance to go but Gemma was less than a year old and we were not willing to take the risk with a baby and a 60 year old grandmother. So we did everything possible to help out this group to organize and whatever was in our power to help them to go out from Italy to Israel.

Before we left Czechoslovakia, my mother-in-law sent ahead all the possessions and valuables and belongs. Everything arrived in Israel and was in storage but since we never made it there and after 4½ years of war, they sold it off.

In Avigliano there was a group of about 20 families, a small agricultural town of 3,000 people, where the first secretary of the Fascist Party had a farm. In summer he spent some time there vacationing. When he arrived there he found that there were about 20 families of foreigners. He inquired who they were and after he found out what they were getting as government subsidy, he got indignant and asked how people could possibly live on that. He told his secretary to supplement those families from his own personal property.

In Potenza we got acquainted with two single ladies. One's name was Pia and the other Maria. Pia was the head of the County Mid-wives, a supervisor. Maria also had some sort of function in the Health

Department. Pia was skinny, about 95 pounds and Maria was tall and about 250 pounds. They were the perfect match. We had many times dinners together, they came over or we went to them and we had lots of fun together. When mama went on vacation with grandmother they came and cooked for me. Pia had on the side a married lover, he was the director of the hospital. These two ladies made our lives more pleasant. They were from northern Italy and had a more worldly outlook.

gg: What happened to your family?

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

bg: My one brother lost his job because he was a Jew, my other brother was put in the local jail because he was a Jew, the third brother was still with the family but was not bothered till 1944. He was teaching and my sister also had a permit. See, if you had work where they needed you, they gave you a certain I.D. card to make you exempt. But my brother, the next older to me was put in jail in 1941 already on the pretext that he was a Jew and that he was in contact with the underground. There was no underground. In 1942 he was transferred to Majdanek and there he died. I heard from another man who was there that he got typhus. They were repairing locomotives and since he had typhus, he laid underneath the trains to warm himself up and the German SS or whatever found him there and kicked him to death. That was told to me by someone who survived and he told me what he witnessed.

The third brother and my father and mother were taken away in 1942 straight from Slovakia to who knows, Auschwitz or somewhere, there was no trace. But the oldest brother in 1944 when the Russian front was closed, he tried to escape and cross to the Russian side. But he was not alone, an aunt was also living there and she was an older person. By himself he would have made it but he didn't want to leave her alone. They were caught. They put them first in a camp in Slovakia and then with a transport to Poland to an extermination camp and that was the end. My oldest sister was in Terezin Camp, that was the Potempkin camp. You know what that is? When the Germans invited the Red Cross to see the camps, they made a front with grocery store and a pharmacy to show the Red Cross that they treat the people right. I even still have a sample of the fake money. That was all front and the Red Cross accepted that, after all, that was only for Jews, who cares? And she survived there because she was working in a warehouse where they selected potatoes so she had potatoes she had what to eat and survived. That was Bertha.

The eldest is Eugene, next is William who died in Majdanek, a famous camp. Bertha went to Terezin and Helena was in Pecek Palace, Prague for 11 months in the basement, she was kept there because she had false paper and they could not prove anything. They finally let her out but by then she had T.B. Julius died with my mother and father in 1942, nobody knows where.

gg: How did you find out about your family?

bg: After the war, there was a special organization, UNRA and every single organization that existed was looking for contacts of people. In

1946, around September or October, after everything settled a little bit and I found I had two sisters that survived the war, I went back to visit them. It was naturally a very traumatic experience. We went to Prague where my sister was living for 50 years previously. We met on the station and I went to their apartment. I brought some food from Italy and some clothing because at that time they still had it very bad and everything was scarce.

I visited with my sister, her two children, and husband, and then with my sister Helena, went to Slovakia and visited Bertha who survived Terezin Camp. Her husband survived in Auschwitz and they also had two children she kept safe in Terezin. So this family unit was the only one which survived the Holocaust.

After I visited the second sister we went all three of us to visit the place where we used to live. After entering the place, all the people that used to be our neighbors came and cried about how they helped and what they were doing for our whole family to prevent their being deported to the camps. I knew that it was all hypocrisy because the moment my family was taken out of the house, they stormed in like vultures and took everything away. I didn't find not even my personal papers and photographs and things like that which would have been very valuable to me. Everything was taken away or destroyed. And most of the population was very hostile to us.

I met some people who survived. Mr. Benow told me he was with William, he was there. He survived because he was a watch-maker and they used him to put the gold together to repair the watches for the Germans. We visited one old friend where we stayed for dinner. They told us all the stories of the last years of our family and how they were taken away. Most of my family was taken in 1942, my brother was taken sooner, probably 1940, 1941. Naturally, nobody found out where it happened or how.

The Czech government was offering me to send a bus to southern Italy to take my family back. They offered me a very good job as director of a printing concern for the Czech government. They wanted us to come back very badly but I didn't see how. I told them that I had to go back to straighten out and liquidate necessary things because I lived there for so many years and I will come back after that. At the same time I sent my wife a telegram that we will continue to eat pasta shuta. That gave her the answer that we will not go back to Czechoslovakia. It strengthened our intention to emigrate and get out of Europe.

You see after the war the separatists were gotten rid of and the Czech and Slovak side got back together and they created a more normal condition. It was not natural to have them separated as the parts of the country are so close. It's less a difference than a Bostonian and a Texan. I speak both Slovak and Czech fluently.

After the war, right away after the army passed Hyak got a position as a counsel in Rome for Czechoslovakia and was also registered for the army in England because in England there was a big Czech army. Then he went back to Prague and got a good position there, we met in Prague. What

happened later when the communists were coming was that he got wind, somebody told him that he should escape because he was on their list and would be sent to Siberia. He escaped, he had a brother in England. The Russians didn't trust him because he was in Czechoslovakia and his brother was in England and he was the cultural representative in Rome. He was on the blacklist and they would have killed him. He escaped a day before they came in.

I don't know if I mentioned that every single man who fought as a volunteer in the Spanish Civil War on the side against Franco, when the Russians occupied, were herded together and not heard of after that. They did that in other countries too, either killed them outright or sent them to Siberia. Why? Because they knew too much, they knew first hand what double dealings the Russians were doing in Spain. My sister told me, including their names. You see in our youth organization we were collecting money and things for the International Brigades and so I knew these men.

ITALY

After the war ended we started to right away look for our family to see if anybody survived. We contacted all the office that were in charge in tracing survivors. At the same time we registered by the foreign immigration for different countries like United States, Canada, Sweden, Australia and South America. We decided that whichever came first, we would go. We didn't register for Israel at that time because you were a baby, grandmother was with us and the conditions in Israel were very very bad so we could not take the risk to go there at that time.

In the meantime, we started to look for sponsors because according to the immigration law at that time, you had to have a guarantor/sponsor for five years in the United States. It means in case you are unable to take care of yourself the guarantor would have to support you so that you should not fall as a burden of the state. We were trying to write to many different organizations as we didn't have anybody in the United States, no relatives. We were the black sheep of the immigrants.

Finally I remembered that we met someone after the occupation that we were working with in the AMGOT office and he told me that in case I ever needed something I should contact him. After so much effort, we contacted him and he got in touch with the Quaker office in Philadelphia. A few months later we got a letter that he found a sponsor for us four people and the sponsor was a Mr. Kar, owner of the Mohawk Shirt Company in Philadelphia. Afterwards we got in touch with Mr. Kar and he put certain conditions to us; that we are not to come to Philadelphia and that we do not stay in New York which anyways we had no intentions.

BARI

As we were working towards our immigration we got notification from Bari where the Joint Distribution Committee and ORT were and that they were looking for a teacher to teach dress making and general sewing in the

camps around Bari. These camps were created for refugees that came from concentration camps until they were ready to immigrate to Israel or wherever. ORT was to give them skills while they were waiting.

We moved from Potenza to Bari when Alice got a job with ORT and we were teaching the people in the several transient refugee camps a trade. In the beginning I didn't have any work but also in a short time I got a job in the camps as a teacher for gardening. That way we were secure for our income for the time until we emigrated.

In about October 1948 we got notification to be ready by November 1st. We were told that we will embark to the United States from Naples on the SS Saturnia.

The time in Bari was pretty nice because there were many people who worked with the military that came from the camp in Faramonte Camp which was really a camp with barbed wire and all the trimmings. Faramonte was the only camp that was really a concentration camp in Italy. Those people became entitled for compensation from Germany also. We were not entitled because we were "confino libero". So these people got jobs by the military which was looking for people to help them. I had lots of friends there.

At the same time, the American Council was calling us for several months prior to our receiving our sponsorship that our quota number was open and we were able to immigrate. After a short time we got the sponsorship papers from Mr. Kar and from then on it was clear sailing.

ATLANTIC CROSSING

Around October 20th we had to be ready with everything packed and sent to the port of Naples and we were expecting every day a call to come to Naples for our final processing, doctor's examination, etc. On November 1st we embarked from Naples in a deluxe ship that was converted during the war for transporting the soldiers and logistical supplies for the Italian army. The ladies had a separate huge room and so did the men both with bunk beds. The comfort was not good but the other things, like the food and friendship, balanced that out.

As it was November, the Atlantic ocean was not very quiet. We had tremendous storms and instead of nine days of travel, we traveled 14 days. Everybody was sick and there were times when the ship had to be hermetically closed, the top, because the waves were larger than the ship. But we all arrived in New York although the ship had some damage.

On top of that there was a dock strike in New York so our belongings went back to Italy and came with the next ship back which was a delay of about three months. We had to live just from the hand luggage that we had with us.

NEW YORK

After arriving in New York we were put in a hotel where we stayed for about 10 days and everyday got some lecture on how to approach or behave in the United States, this was sponsored by the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). One special lecture I remember well from one professor

who came here years before, also an immigrant. He said "If you go to Times Square and if you do not keep the pace as the people you see running, you will be pushed to the side." He characterized the American competitive spirit so that you have to push or be pushed out.

We decided after seeing New York that probably the best way will be to go to Cleveland, Ohio where according to our information, there was lots of diversified industry and businesses. We were hoping that in that place we would be able to find jobs and settle down.

We took the train from New York to Cleveland and at the station we were expected by a young man who did not speak any other language but English. So the whole situation was very pathetic. He brought us to a house which had two small units. The unit we were in had beds but no mattresses. He showed us that the mattresses were in the backyard thrown on the grass, rotten and wet. This was December 6th. We made a little bundle of some towels with soap and went out and cleaned up the mattresses and set up housekeeping.

We were getting some money from the Jewish Family Service and they told us to come a few days later to their office downtown, about 12 miles away. Again, when we arrived there was only this young man assigned to us and we could not communicate. We were wondering that in a community that has about 10 or more different nationalities and many Jews from all over the world, and us speaking 5 or 6 languages, that we could not have someone assigned to us with whom we would be able to communicate with.

I started to look for work and I found a job which paid 75¢ per hour in a wholesale house. Naturally what work they give you is to bring the freight in. After a while they saw that I could do a little bit more than that and put me inside. A short while after that, I was able to do a much more profitable job for them than helping bring the freight in. Within one year I was able to memorize several thousand items and knew the prices better than the boss himself or the guy responsible for the pricing. Later on I was sent out as a salesman which created lots of animosity between the other people working there who had many years of seniority and also the other salesmen there.

I went on the road as a salesman and was doing pretty well so that in a short time we were able to buy our own house. Coming back to the Jewish community, they promised us that if we find an apartment they will help us furnish it. But we didn't get even one nail or spoon to furnish our apartment. The excuse was that I was making 75¢ an hour and supporting myself and three other people. But as you see, we made it on our own.

As I started to work we went every evening after work to school. That was very helpful in order to learn the essential basics of English to communicate with people. One thing I have to give credit to many people that I was dealing with. They were very helpful and the language barrier was not hindering me to progress because they saw that I knew about the product that they were buying and that I knew the function and prices better than many who were born here and spoke perfect English.

We don't have any complaints. United States as a country was good to us, gave us the opportunity to make a living and raise a family. But culturally and socially, we are, and I think we will continue to be, seen as marginal citizens. Because it is very hard to integrate culturally in a society that does not put too much value on anything except material possessions.



Barrack of Campagna detention camp,
Belo Grott (left).

12/84

Inmates of detention camp in Campagna



"Money" produced by the Nazis to falsify to the Red Cross the true conditions of the Concentration Camp.