

Interview With ELIZABETH ZIERER  
Holocaust Media Project  
Date: June 2, 1986 Place:  
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JW This is Judy Welish(ph), interviewing Elizabeth Zierer. The date is June 2, 1986, in the home of Elizabeth Zierer.

Q: AND I GUESS TO BEGIN WITH, IF YOU'LL TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT WHERE YOU COME FROM AND, AND WHAT YOUR BACKGROUND AND CHILDHOOD WAS BASICALLY LIKE.

A: I'm born in Vienna, Austria and I'm partly Austrian, original Austrian and Hungarian nationality, because after the First World War we opted to become Hungarians because we lived on a big estate and the farm was in a Hungarian -- in the Hungarian state that was dissected from the Austrian. It was Austrian/Hungarian and then became Hungary, so actually I was of Hungarian nationality.

Q: DO YOU SPEAK HUNGARIAN NOW?

A: Yes, I speak Hungarian.

Q:

A:

Q:

A:

Q: OKAY.

PCIA 1/2/86  
NUMBER 750  
1986-1

A: Most of my life I lived in Hungary on our farm, but I went to school in Vienna, and I finished studies in Vienna and became an interpreter in Vienna. I'm a licensed interpreter.

But then afterwards when Hitler came into Austria we moved entirely to Hungary and I became a poultry breeding expert. And I have also a degree in animal husbandry and poultry breeding, and I was one of the foremost poultry breeders, woman, the youngest one in the country, financed and aided by the state of Hungary. And I did this to the very -- until April 1944 when the -- when Hitler betrayed Hungary and Admiral Horkey(ph) and April or May 23 I believe, the Gestapo came up and took us away. My mother and grandfather, my grandmother and my aunt and myself. I have two brothers -- I had two brothers; one of them was not with us, the other one was with us. One was -- one died in Vanverson(ph) a month before liberation and the other one is still alive and lives here, very close to where I live.

I lost my family; my mother, my brother, my grandmother and we all were shipped to Auschwitz after having been congregated or collected in Somberti(ph), which is a Hungarian small town where we had been mistreated and beaten by Hungarian Gestapo. And then we were shipped

in cattle trains and I'd like to skip most of that part out completely. And we were -- I was six weeks in Auschwitz, together with friends of ours, also from Somberti, namely a young girl who was about ten years younger than I am and her mother, who was a good much -- much older than me of course, but looked very young. So when it came in Auschwitz to the selection, we were all fortunately -- we were together. My girlfriend and her mother and myself.

But I never saw my mother again, nor my grandmother, nor my aunt, nor my brother for that matter. So we were selected for forced labor. And we were shipped, unbeknownst to us, to Lishtinow(ph) near Caslow(ph) into a concentration camp, forced labor camp, concentration camp. Because there were many foreign workers who were in forced labor camp. But concentration camp was much worse than that. And we were under the guard of S.S. people. And I was there from about August 'til liberation, which was April 25, 1945.

There is hardly anything that we didn't do or didn't have to do, such as digging river beds in sub zero weather, working in factories, lifting ammunition of twenty kilos, two thousand of those in one shift. Now twenty kilos is exactly the weight of one big tall milk can that would be shipped from the, from the farm, which will give you an idea of how much we

had to slave.

Not only that, but we had to walk to the factory to where it was done, a half hour to work and a half hour back from work, in an undernourished state that we had been in.

At the end of this experience, on the day of liberation, I weighed seventy pounds. Now it was no better and no worse than any other concentration camp, but looking back we were lucky because the commanding officer of that camp had received his post as a privilege. I believe he was wounded in the war and received this as a bonus, so he ruled over that concentration camp. And while I was singled out to be -- maltreated by him on several occasions, he still was the most humane one probably in the camp, and it is thanks to him that I'm still alive, because when we were on a death march, he gave us a parole that if anybody would shoot any one of us then that person would be shot right away. And this is basically, briefly, my experience.

The most fascinating experience is really the story of my liberation, much more fascinating than what I experienced in Auschwitz. But even so -- and Auschwitz and Distanoph(ph), of course, even so, it remains a memory that I would rather forget and much of it has already faded away and what has remained, and what I did not wish to suppress were

the facts of life, which are different when you are under normal circumstances, such as when you sleep. I have written Na chapter about sleep, what it means to sleep at home, or what it means to sleep in a concentration camp. And again, what it means to sleep when you are liberated.

But for all of the us the worst was the night shift because we could not -- we just simply could not get adjusted to it.

Q: HOW DID THAT WORK THEN IN THE CONCENTRATION CAMP, AS FAR AS THE WORK SHIFTS WENT? DID THEY CHANGE ASSIGNMENTS BY THE WEEK OR DID THEY...

A: I would think perhaps by the month. I cannot recall that. It was not always night shift. That would not have been so bad, but since it was shifting, it was once morning shift, once afternoon shift and once night shift. But at least a week. I would have thought perhaps a month's change, rather than a week.

Q: SO YOU, YOU WOULD -- FOR A PERIOD YOU MIGHT BE ASSIGNED TO WORK THE SWING SHIFT...

A: Right.

Q: ...I GUESS WHAT WE WOULD CALL IT NOW. AND, AND THESE FACTORIES WHERE THEY HAD YOU IN SLAVE LABOR, THEY KEPT THEM OPERATING TWENTY-FOUR HOURS A DAY OBVIOUSLY?

A: The factories, oh indeed. We were furnishing the ammunition for the army.

Q: UH-HUH.

A: As I said, I lifted the bombs for two thousand each shift. I don't think I could even lift one -- certainly I couldn't lift one now. But two thousand is really, even for a man, as I say, you figure out a big can full with milk, that is, that is forty pounds or twenty kilos and as weak as we were, that was one of the assignments. The other one was to dig in the forest in the frozen soil with big axes and make holes into the river bed.

Q: WHY DID THEY HAVE YOU DOING THAT?

A: That's a good question.

Q: YOU DON'T KNOW?

A: Some of it you didn't know why. Some of it softened you. I think they wanted to connect a river with a, with a river bed. In other words, they needed water for the factory, I believe, I'm not sure.

Q:

A: We were assigned and there were, of course, foremen etc., and what, what was amazing is that some of the people became extremely ambitious to meet the goals, as if it would have been in their favor.

I have some notes which I remember now. We worked together with a French labor camp inmates and they would say, are you crazy, you work too hard. Do you speak French?

Q: NO.

A: No. They, they said in French, we work for the victory. You understand. And I immediately understood. So we did something -- I instigated something that is called passive resistance. I made believe that I dig a hole into the frozen soil, but most of the time I didn't do it.

Q: GOOD FOR YOU.

A: And we joined forces, the smarter ones joined forces and did the same thing. So I was always very rebellious in there without being...

Q: OVERTLY SO.

A: ...without being exposed, because that, of course, would have cost my life.

We also, we also did something very interesting in the factory, which was submerged under, underground. And it's a very well known factory, particularly now, for big conglomerate. Perhaps you have heard of it?

Q: IT SOUNDS FAMILIAR, YEAH.

A: It has been now forty-five years, or forty years to be exact, for my liberation and it is this year that that

factory -- or rather the president or whoever is on the board, has decided to repay us for our misery. So it took them forty years.

Q: THEY'RE PAYING RESTITUTION?

A: Well, supposedly. I haven't seen a penny yet.

Q: OH. GOSH THEY WAITED LONG ENOUGH.

A: So what we did about the other things, besides lifting those bombs -- shells that is, we also made the -- what do you call this -- the ammunition, the powder. The powder kegs. And for shipment, etcetera, etcetera, they were supposed -- they were emerged in wax, in hot wax. So the keg was powder and phosphorus, yellow.

Q: UH-HUH, PHOSPHORUS.

A: And this one had to be wrapped small, it looked like kegs, disks. And they were submerged into hot wax. And the first sensational thing was that actually we were turning all yellow from the powder and we would be walking half hour to the factory and half hour away from the factory, eight hundred people, all yellow like canary birds. We didn't have much hair because our hair was shorn originally, but it grew back somewhat, a little bit, but the little bit was just like now the, the punks go around with blonde hair. We looked orange. We went totally orange, from top to bottom. And to the



natives we really looked like ghosts and I wouldn't be surprised that they didn't know whether we were human or not.

Q: THEY PROBABLY THOUGHT THEY WERE SEEING A VISION, YEAH.

A: Probably. So not only did we do this, but we discovered that the hot wax would be wonderful to make candles. So we started, of course, unbeknownst to the foreman, to make candles out -- to steal the wax and make candles out of it. And I became an extreme expert in candle making and I sold the candles for a pat of butter or a handkerchief or whatever we just needed badly, because we were the only ones who had candles, and candle fire was very important in a camp. So it became, I wouldn't say a thriving business, but it helped me survive. And we all of us did the same thing, but not all of us made candles. And the wick -- I don't recall -- yes, the wick was from, was from, I think from a -- from the packages that we had to package. You know, from the twine.

Q: WHEN YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT YOUR PASSIVE RESISTANCE WHERE YOU MADE A SHOW OF ACTUALLY DOING WORK WHEN YOU REALLY DIDN'T, DID YOU DO SIMILAR THINGS IN THE FACTORY?

A: You mean some more of this? Constantly. Wherever I could. I mean instead of -- well you see, some, some idiots

came and said I made, I made 2,500 shells today, I lifted. They had to lift them, then they put them down again, then they lifted them a little bit higher. They were extremely proud. Well nothing of that sort, of course, myself and the gang that, that helped me on this. I mean we were convinced, we are idiots, totally trained to do that, so if, if it was a matter of making bombs, the phosphorus kegs, of course we remained slow in our work.

Q: THEN THAT, THAT WAS...

A: I mean many things like that. It can't be really described. I don't recall exactly how much -- I, I remember the phosphorus was the most important thing, because that's really was key work. I think we, we teamed up in groups of five and one swang the axe and the other four rested, you know, to conserve energy. So that I was always in a group, somebody who did something, because it would have been otherwise too ugly. But we, we were very well organized at that time.

Q: I SEE.

A: Well, you have to be inventive, really, in many, many ways. And ones we invented goodness, yes.

But however, it was -- it became -- hunger, was of course the greatest in any -- not to speak of illnesses, so

sometimes very often we couldn't drag up heat anymore. We didn't have shoes or those who had shoes, those were the shoes that we came in with from Hungary. We had one dress that had to serve all purposes. Many had no dresses anymore. But in the -- I don't know if that interests you -- but in the camp -- within the camp there were enormous frictions. You know what a kappo(ph) is?

Q: YES.

A: Okay. Well there were, within the camp, kappos, that this I'm describing the camp where I was, which was 90% Jewish camp. And the kappos, of course, were Jewish people, but not everybody liked them. As a matter of fact, most of the kappos were very bad, beastly, particularly because they sought favors like we would have liked. But they had the power to do so, so they never worked hard. They were cleaning the, the cabin for the, for the commanding officer, for instance, while we were slaving in the factory. And they suddenly got scraps and bits of food when we never had any. So they were really -- they became more enemies than anything else. Most of them, not all of them, but most of them. And I could have made a much better life for all of us, but as it is, as I say, it was -- the hatred was between the drones and the bees really. So -- and also, they were always well

dressed. They had access to all the shoes and the dresses.

It became a pretty bitter struggle within the community. And we didn't think that we would survive really. And the worst came really when Easter came, Easter 1945. On Good Friday, they made us leave the camp and we started a death march, which was unbeknownst to us. We were told that we are going to join forces in Bavaria, where Hitler had congregated his people, but we never got to that stage.

We took, we took a train, I believe, I don't know whether we took a train. I suppose but I'm not sure, and went to, to Dresden(ph), which is in the east. And we arrived, I'm sure it was -- we didn't go to, to Dresden by train, that's for sure, but I do not recall exactly at what stage we started the death march. The truth is that when we arrived in a concentration -- in a prison camp in Dresden, which was had for us, by that time Dresden had just been bombed to nothingness. Near us, just across the fence, was a camp of men who had never seen people like us before. As it turned out, they were Norwegians. And the Norwegians were there for political reasons very obviously. Slave labor camp, Norwegians or whatever. When they saw us they were so shocked and so horrified at our -- what we looked like, as I said, it was, it was, I must have been seventy-five pounds at that

time. We were freezing, we didn't have any dresses, nothing anymore, so all these people lined up along the fence and as we walked by, we were not permitted to talk to them, of course, and the guards were pretty grim about that. But without any hesitancy, they threw everything over the fence that you can imagine, from food to clothes, they tore up their -- they really -- we are totally naked, and gave us everything that they had. I'll never forget that as long as I live, because they felt so horrified when they saw us.

This, this joy didn't last long. Actually one or two days only. And then we were made to walk on the death march, on the real death march. And that lasted ten days, if not more. No, it must have lasted at least two weeks, from Good Friday on, two weeks or three weeks, and in the end there was nothing to eat anymore. And nobody was fed, nobody was given anything, there just wasn't anything. So we stole potatoes out of the potato fields, but even that became -- unfortunately, there weren't always potatoes around, so the last days I certainly, and many others, we ate and cooked the bark from the trees as tea and that was the only nourishment we had. And that was the state in which the Americans -- in which we were finally liberated. But that's a different story, which I'll tell you soon.

But perhaps the most interesting fact about this death march, death march, was that our camp had eight hundred people and there were about six or seven such camps congregating from all over Germany, Poland, Austria, wherever. In other words, all the concentration camps were made to walk towards the center, that was the Nazis idea to meet us all in Bavaria where Hitler wanted to start a new German Reich. And when we saw -- when we left Dresden we were horrified to realize that the bombers, the American bombers, the allied bombers would fly low over us and sent down incendiary bombs -- what do you call those...

Q: INCENDIARY?

A: Incendiary.

Q: I'M NOT SURE HOW TO SAY IT EITHER. UH-HUH.

A: The one that that start with a flash fire and then travel over like a carpet fire.

Q: YEAH.

A: Well they wanted to hit anything that was inside, because it was a final struggle. And we were terrified that they would hit us, our old friends, and we would be lodged sometimes at night on the field, or sometimes in barracks, whatever was available.

But one of the first days we all met at the huge

football field, and we were all huddling together, our camp and the next camp and the third camp and the fourth camp and all of us had the famous concentration camp garb, which we were supposed to wear all the time and never did, and these are gray and blue striped prisoners coats or garbs. Now it was actually also my idea, and I got together with my two friends that we had at that time, and we divided -- we got -- we took volunteers and we would very quickly walk around the, around the football field to alert all the other camps that from here on when the bombers come to straight us, we should not disburse as we had done before and hide, but we should stay in a group because only then will they from above recognize the coats, the striped coats in masses. And it was, I must confess, a brilliant idea, because it worked marvelous. And later on, when I was already residing in Berkeley, I met one of the pilots who was part of that squad and I told him the story and he was fascinated, because it was exactly what they tried to avoid, was to avoid these clusters of people, knowing that they were concentration people.

Now also interesting is the fact that, of course, from that moment on the S.S. guards who guarded us on the death march were terrified, believing that they would be killed. And tried to snatch away our garb and, and hid under

the coats.

Q: WHAT WEASELS.

A: Well you get demented when you do that I guess, in desperation. Now in the end it was so bad that we were so hungry that we stole every peasant that we -- where we passed by, we stole and stole and tried to eat the food that the pigs, the pigs were fed with. We hushed the pigs away and ate out of the troughs and that began to be disaster and actually one or two of those people were shot by the guards. And this is the only loss we had on the death march, because thanks to the commanding officer who then expelled those two guards immediately and said from here on, anybody who would harm any one of us will be immediately shot by him. And that was the reason why we really all survived. It wouldn't have lasted long, because none of us was capable of moving much further. And many people stayed behind that couldn't move with the death march.

Q: THIS COMMANDING OFFICER YOU HAD, YOU SAID IT WAS SOME SORT OF PRIVILEGED ASSIGNMENT HE WAS GIVEN TO COMMAND THE CAMP. I WOULD THINK, OR LEAST WHAT I'VE HEARD BEFORE IS THAT A LOT OF TIMES THOSE GERMAN OFFICERS... (TAPE ENDS, TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE) ...BUT MAYBE THIS MAN...

A: They lived in great comfort. I mean, he had his



girlfriend, a beautiful, pretty German girl, and he was served hand and foot, naturally, by his cloys, by the kappos, who tried their best to serve, as I say, in every way, and got their bits from the, from the home, and were privileged were to get, I think, another mattress or something like that, you know. So he, in this case, he enjoyed very much and I would say -- I suppose I'm unusual in this also, in my misery I did write to the investigating committees after the war and asked that he be spared and told them our experience with him.

Q: DO YOU THINK IT DID ANY GOOD?

A: Oh, I'm sure it did. I hope so. I can only say I hope so.

Q: YOU DON'T KNOW?

A: No, we don't know. We don't know. It was a decent thing to do for me.

Q: LET ME ASK YOU ABOUT THE KAPPOS. DID YOU FEEL THAT YOU WERE TREATED DIFFERENTLY THAN THE JEWISH PRISONERS?

A: No, nobody knew what, what village I was from. What did they care.

Q: I ONLY ASK BECAUSE OF WHAT...

A: No.

Q: ...YOU LED ME TO BELIEVE EARLIER.

A: Oh, we were not singled out in any certain way, no.

Q: BUT, BUT YOU FOUND OUT WHO THE OTHER...

A: Yes, that just happened to be that way. It wasn't too difficult.

Q: YOU WERE CATHOLIC THEN BEFORE THE WAR?

A: Well yes, but not long before the war. I really converted in 1937.

Q: OH, OKAY. AND BECAUSE OF THAT THEY DIDN'T ACCEPT THAT. I'M WONDERING...

A: Oh, you mean Hitler?

Q: YEAH, WHY WAS IT YOU WERE IN PRISON?

A: Oh my dear you are naive. You really haven't learned your history.

Q: NO, I DID, I JUST, YOU KNOW, I FIGURED...

A: We didn't have the great grandparents.

Q: OKAY. THAT'S WHAT I FIGURED. I WAS JUST, JUST CHECKING.

A: It had nothing to do with religion.

Q: NO, YOUR ANCESTORS.

A: My ancestors -- we were all Jewish, I'm Jewish also if it comes to this.

Q: OKAY, OKAY.

A: But if it's a question of religion, that's a different story.

Q: OKAY. NOW, WELL THEN LET ME ASK YOU THIS ON THAT POINT, IN THE CHAPTER YOU LET ME READ, LET'S, LET'S TALK ABOUT

YOUR FAITH THEN AND HOW IT HELD YOU UP AT THAT TIME. OR IF YOU DON'T MIND, RELATING YOUR CHRISTMAS TREE EPISODE.

A: I can, I can read it down.

Q: SURE.

A: It's easier.

Q: WOULD YOU LIKE TO?

A: Yes.

Q: OKAY. THAT'S ANOTHER THING I FIND UNUSUAL, THAT YOU WERE WILLING TO WRITE DOWN YOUR THOUGHTS.

A: Oh, from the very first moment on, because only question was how would I write it down. In German, in English or whatnot, and I wrote it down in English actually. You see, but in order to explain this better I would have to tell you more about my liberation days, which is more fascinating -- huh?

Q: IF YOU PREFER NOT TO, THAT'S ALL RIGHT TOO.

A: No, no, I want to.

Q: OH, PLEASE DO.

A: About the liberation?

Q: YEAH.

A: That's a whole new book my dear. That has never been said or done before. You will have something very unique.

But let me first come back to your question.

Q: OKAY.

A: Which has to do with my, my chapter on how could you survive. And I will just read to you.

Christmas was approaching. This was 1944, and we began to prepare for the celebration of our greatest holiday. We began planning for that day far ahead. It may sound peculiar to you, because this is now a story told to you by a person who had the Catholic faith. Not having any priest or other spiritual help it was left to our personal conscience to prepare our soul in a proper way. The prayers at Lent had been most fervent, and then hopes began to fade away and there were moments when we felt lost or forgotten by his guidance. We had hoped again to be free for the day of his birth, but history was different. War was at its peak, although the very secret news we received assured us of victory by the allies. But we were frightened that the time would pass too slowly, that we would not be able to struggle through to see the day of all days.

This day we planned our Christmas celebration. We had to get a tree. That was certain. And here for the first time we were able to bribe the German guards and win them for our end. They too wanted badly to get Christmas trees for their own home or homes and thus we planned together. With their help and to our utter amusement, we stole the trees out

of the large forest, which surrounded the ammunition factory where we worked forced labor. The guards gave us a saw and we chopped the trees, and under their protection, in fact sometimes under their military clothes, we were able to smuggle a tree out of the factory gate, where special S.S. police were assigned to check our coming and going for hidden or stolen material.

The decorations we cut from little paper bits found on the road. The candles we formed with our own hands during the working period in the factory, while forced to dip the explosive powder case into hot liquid wax, and I managed to find time to form small candles out of the matted wax. They were just crude little yellow pieces, with the white wool sack for a wick, stolen also from the Germans, stop being used for the publication of quick masses. But they gave the light we needed to adorn our tree. And I became a practiced candle maker by the end of this period. So much so in fact that I started to exchange candles for other items. The silver trimmings we gathered from the road where the allied had dropped them in bundles to disrupt airwaves for enemy planes. So it became a really lovely little Christmas tree we produced in our infinite inventive spirits, clad in plastic robes surrounded by twigs and other decorations.

We were singing and reciting and praying fervently

together, for each of us and for those who were not amongst us, for the ones we knew who had already long, long ago been put to eternal rest, and for those whose fate we did not know were still amongst the living or was their heart no longer beating. For them we said our prayers in particular. It was a clear hopeful feeling that we knew that the longer we stayed together on that memorable day, the more we felt that God walked right into our midsts. That we had found new strengths, new purpose to conquer our enemy, our weaknesses and our despair.

Shall I read on about the Jewish -- that's another thing of this.

Q: THAT WAS FASCINATING.

A: Yes, okay. Now, as I said, in concentration camp every day brought something garish, but most, most of the time, the most important thing was to get food, whichever way, whatever way.

I'm sure you have heard that since we were deprived of vitamins that was our greatest yearning in every respect. We would do just anything for a carrot, for instance. And many times the kitchen would be robbed at midnight by those who just couldn't withstand the urge to steal. And it was stealing -- our pleasure was to steal from the Germans whenever we could, there's no question about that. While I

have never stole in my life, neither before nor after, but this gave me immense pleasure, to really see how I can get hold of things without being involved officially into it. So these were ten, eleven terrible months. And at the end, as I said, on our death march, things became very dangerous. By the end we saw Russian people going home, being driven home, those were, those were prisoners of the Germans. Everybody fled in every direction.

The camps were herded in an incredible way, although we could hardly walk anymore, and so on one of the last days, actually five days before the Americans overran the territory, we were -- we went across the Elster, which is the river near Dresden, and we are sleeping in a hay -- what do you call it -- hay loft, and beside it -- we didn't want to reach the Russians that would come from one side to liberate us. We would prefer to reach the Americans. And it took us quite a while to find out where the Russians are and where the Americans are, which direction to go. And so at night the friend and her mother from Sombeti and myself and another friend that we had made during our stay in the camp, and actually the nurse of that camp, a forage girl, we all huddled together, we fired -- huddled together and decided we really want to get away from the crowd because we were afraid that they would massacre us on the last day. So we sneaked away,

one by one, we made a plan and my friend's mother who was already way over fifty by that time, and I myself, we decided we would all sneak out individually and hide in a certain ditch near the village and meet there. And we were fortunate and lucky enough to be able to do that.

And suddenly we found ourself totally alone, the camp had already left. They had not found out we are not here anymore, they didn't have a roll call by that time anymore. And suddenly we were free, and we didn't know how it came about. We were still very terrified that somebody might find us. So we started walking, believing towards the American military. History will tell you that the Americans were too swift and overran the Russian part. The Russians were supposed to take over, according to Roosevelt's arrangements, were supposed to take over one part and it would have been split, actually by the Elder, by the river near Dresden, but the Americans were too swift, having took it and took over what the, what the Russians had not reached yet. So we walked away from the, from all the crowd and remember we, we were still yellow like canaries, and walking, it was pretty dangerous, because everybody must have known that we are...

Q: YEAH.

A: So we -- and we were still terribly hungry. The first thing was that we wanted to go and get some food. So we



walked towards a barn that we saw on the road, on a deserted road at that moment, and knocked at the door of the farmer and they just were horrified to see us. But we made no bones about it, we spoke German and so finally -- they didn't let us into the house, we looked much too scary and they were absolutely sure that we were robbers and that we didn't -- that came out later. So they made us sit in the garden, and the guard and brought a big -- they had just cooked a big pot of potatoes and they had just milked the cows, so they brought everything that they had and fed us for the first time. But we were aware that we had to be very careful and that we mustn't eat too much, too quick, too everything. It was very difficult to, to resist. But we managed to get some cottage cheese, some chives, some potatoes and some milk. And to this day we friends, the five of us, on the 25th of April we always eat potatoes, cottage cheese with chives.

Q: OH MY GOD, REALLY.

A: It's a religious thing that we absolutely -- it's a vow that we have given. It was the first food we ever had.

We then had strengthened ourselves a little bit, they wanted to know who we are, and it was obvious that these people were fleeing the next two hours, leaving the house and everything, because they were fleeing away from the Communists, from the, from the Russians. And they were

terrified. The Germans were terrified of Russians and rightly so.

Q: YEAH.

A: And I will tell you why. But in that time they just wouldn't believe -- they could not believe -- we could not convince them that we were not murderers or regular criminals. It was impossible to make them understand.

Later on, and even during concentration camp, often the Germans would look at it pitiful, while they were scrubbing their homes for the Saturday event, or Sunday, all Germans scrubbed homes, the staircase, the windows, everything, and we were just walking and sloshy, it was just a terrible sight contrary to these people. Nobody to this day wanted to believe we were not criminals. That's for sure.

And if you read in the papers that the Germans didn't know, I believe so in a certain way. They may not have known exactly what it was all about. They were meant to believe that they were criminals who had to...

Q: BE PUNISHED.

A: ...be punished.

So anyway, then we walked away and we wanted desperately to know where, where the American line is. So we walked towards them and it was -- you probably have heard that or read about it, an incredible sight. All over the, the road

-- they were not, they were not freeways, they were country roads, there were helmets and guns and everything what they had, the Germans had already thrown away in order not to be recognized. All -- everything was thrown away, as much as they could. Then there were the Russians who walked in the opposite direction, who hardly could move. They were dragging their feet and they were certainly worse to look at, if anything, than we did.

And I would have to flash back for a minute and tell you that when we were in the forest and we saw the Russians being mistreated, maltreated by the German guards, we always said to each other, God forbid if ever they are liberated. So nothing would be surprising because they were just terrible maltreated. Just awful. Anyway, I don't even want to think of that it's so bad. You can see still the shudders.

So we went on this fork, some going east, some going west, nobody really knowing where they were going. But after having been fed a little bit and having started our afternoon walk, we hoped to meet somebody. And lo and behold suddenly we were confronted with an incredible sight, now we know it's called a Jeep, and we just stood, four up, four men in uniform. For a moment we thought maybe it's the Russians, but no, they speak -- somebody chewed gum, which we had not seen before. And so we said, are you Americans. And they were

just aghast because they had never seen us before. They were freshly -- they had not yet encountered anyone from concentration camp, walking towards them. So it was a most emotional sight that one cannot really describe. It just so happened that they were all Jewish boys and it was the hugging and the kissing and everything went on. It was just too much emotion.

So finally to make -- to put those emotions aside for a moment, they made us sit in the Jeep and they dashed away with us, God knows where. They dashed into a near village. They went to the mayor, the mayor's home, found out where the mayor lives, and said this is now our house, you people move downstairs. We have guests upstairs. And you jolly well take care of them to their utmost -- to your utmost. Otherwise, we will be checking on them. You give them -- you clad them, you feed them, until we come back.

So eventually it happened. We walked into the place and it was a huge upstairs. And in no time, when we looked there was a bed and it was fresh linen, and you know the Germans can be awfully neat and clean. It was unbelievable. So before we knew, they had set the table downstairs in the drawing room and the first meal we really had sitting down at a nice German china, as we were, they had what a German specialty that's called kewgalu(ph).

Q: I'VE HEARD OF IT.

A: You have heard of it. It's a German cake, which is sort of a twisted cake. And there was coffee and whipped cream and I remember those things. We were very careful not to eat too much. And then we retired and for the first time we had showers and baths. It was simply fantastic. It's the most marvelous recollection. And then, of course, they had to scramble all kind of dresses from their own, some of which was okay, most of which we cannot -- we could not wear. Shoes and so on was almost impossible for us to find. So whatever they had, they gave. But for the first day it was all right. After eight days it wasn't all right anymore.

And these boys came back later and then we told them a little bit about how and what and so on, we started to become very close friends and they promised they would never leave us again and they would take care of us. As a matter of fact, I just happened to have in my possession -- just by chance really -- a little letter that I can show you, which one of those guys took down, I dictated to him and he sent it over to Switzerland where I had contacts and remembered the address of contacts. And I can show this to you right away. It's here. I don't know whether you can read or not.

In our march across Germany many people have been freed. One of these, Elizabeth Zierer, from was

very hungry, asked that I drop you a note to say she is well and safe. In the near future she will attempt to contact you again. Sincerely. Sgt. Halleran(ph). 26th of April. That was one day after my liberation. And I have the original letter.

Q: HAVE YOU BEEN IN CONTACT WITH HIM SINCE THEN?

A: No, we lost track of all of these guys. Not all of them, but most of them actually. The only one with whom I'm still in contact, and that comes a little bit later is Henry Kissinger.

Q: OH MY GOD, REALLY? WOW.

A: Okay. Well are you now interested that I continue?

Q: OF COURSE. SURE.

A: Because now this is more liberation.

Q: NO PROBLEM.

A: After which we can come back to whatever you want to ask me.

Q: NO, THAT'S ALL RIGHT.

A: It's not going yet is it? That was the first day and he sent me to bed and I remember every phase of it. We looked in the mirror, we couldn't believe our eyes how we looked, or what we were dressed with. The nicest part, and this is why I wrote a chapter about what it means to sleep and what it means survival, the nicest part was the clean white

sheets, of which we have dreamt throughout this concentration camp and we dreamt about food. I am sure you have heard many times that we added our time in concentration camp, mostly with sending notes, verbally or written, about food, what we wanted to cook when we came home.

Well, fortunately, we didn't have to wait any longer. Food was plentiful in the house. And these people, the mayor and his wife and daughter, cooked for us naturally, of course. But they weren't so very quick with, with the dresses and with the shoes.

In the meantime these guys, the American guys, came back and we made lots of friends with them. It was, you know, they were magnets. What more could you have hoped for. And they were, they were Jewish, they were really nice, wonderful guys. And they swore they would never leave us. And one nice day they didn't come back and that was the end of their story. And we felt abandoned. We were horrified. They were moved so quickly, have we have learned later, that they didn't have any time to let us know.

So after having slept there for three or four days without any contact with nobody, we felt terrible, and abandoned and exposed to God knows what. We knew that the Russians were supposed to move in soon and all the Germans were terrified and in horror and wanted to leave. But what we

needed most is food stamps, which at that time was an absolute necessity, and clothes and orientation. So amongst us five, it was decided that my friend, the daughter of the mother and myself would go into town and search -- seek the governor, the American governor of military government, or the Red Cross or something, so that we can get help and so that we are protected. That was very important. And because we were, we were chosen because we were the only ones who spoke fluent English at that time already. So we got dressed up, we found, we found that two of them had abandoned their old shoes in order to give them to us and so we put our on and went to town. And walked to a town called Wolfson(ph), which is a rather -- I would say like Sacramento here, what we would call a large town, which was the seat of the government. And we walked into this holy place, and it was guarded, of course, and they wouldn't let us in at first, but we were smart. I don't recall how, we moved forward and forward and finally we reached the holiest of all doors, the governor's steps -- the governor's place. And we finally used some communication, I do not recall what, who opened the door and he was sitting there very tall, very amiable man, in all his decorations. He was a major in the Army and he had been the governor of Wolfson, which is a very important role he played. He said what do you want here and how come that you're not with your



camp people and we tried to explain it briefly that we have abandoned the camp because we don't want to go back to Hungary, we don't want to go back to communist and so we need desperately...(TAPE ENDS, TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO) Are you sure. Just visiting the governor for the first time.

Q: THAT'S RIGHT.

A: And his name was Major Kelly. And he was a most jovial looking guy, but awfully stern, not asking many questions, just listening to our pleas to give us food stamps and dresses. And he was angry because we were not with the camp, but we were alone. He didn't like that. So anyway, he asked where we were staying, how he could get in touch with us and he would think matters over. So we thought, well we'll probably never hear from him again and we went home rather disappointed. That was on a weekday morning and we had just laid down in this wonderful white sheets, with eiderdown and whatnot, just wonderful, and probably we all took bathes and bathes and bathes. Suddenly we heard some enormous commotion and the mayor of the, the owners of the house left up to us and said, the military is coming, the military is coming. Well as it turned out, it was the Major Kelly, in person, who was not announced to us at all beforehand, who had come in, who had stopped in front of his house with all his followers. He had about eight soldiers with him, the sergeant, the

lieutenant, the soldiers of personal -- what do you call it -- his personal crew.

Q: PROBABLY LIEUTENANT AND LIKE THAT?

A: Yes, there were eight, and we had barely time to get dressed and then he walked into our room, which was a bedroom and the dining room, everything together. We ate upstairs, we didn't eat with the Germans of course. And he just stopped in there, the picture I will never forget, and every one of them, one he introduced the second, the third one, and then the fourth one and then the fifth one, by the time there was eight. Every one of them put his hand in the pocket -- in their pockets and brought out an orange, two oranges, an apple, two apples, they were all filled with all kind of goodies we hadn't seen in a full year. And they all dumped it on the table and said we brought you something.

Q: OH MY GOD.

A: And of course we were in tears and I still have tears when I think of it. And then we sat around the table and all these military guys who were very anxious to make friends with us, very interested in who we are, how, how come. It turned out really that we were the first concentration camp victims that they had seen. And because we spoke English fluently, my girlfriend, Mayda(ph) is her name, and myself were seated next to the Major Kelly and the others were seated

with the others, and they made fun -- they all spoke a little English, some spoke German and suddenly he said to me, why don't you want to go home to Hungary. And as I said for nothing, it was worse. I don't want to go home to Hungary, it's communist, we have -- I have already had communists in my family, we already fed communism after the first world war. We were persecuted because we were bourgeois and we were so called rich people. I would dread to go back as long as the Russians are there. And all of us felt the same way. And all we want to do is to go home, but not home, we can't go home really until what we know what's going on. Because we have all relatives and friends in Europe, elsewhere, England particularly and some of them even American.

So while this conversation was going on I still had no idea why -- no inkling what he was aiming at. He said now can you be discreet, he said to me in a whispering voice; and I said yes, of course. He said, make no emotion, do not show your emotions but I'll tell you and you tell it to your friends after we have left, tomorrow morning at four o'clock be prepared, we will take you with us. And I said nothing, I couldn't -- it's difficult to restrain myself. And then they got back and they all left just in groups, one after the other, after the other. And we still didn't know what was going on. So they had brought us some, some food, but not

very much. No dresses and no this and no that. So when the doors closed we were not permitted to tell it to the mayor, or to the landlord, so then I told them what happened. And we were absolutely just so excited, so of course we couldn't sleep and we didn't have anything to pack, that's for sure, except our very few belongings that we had, which was nothing. And at four o'clock they tiptoed up, the, the assistants, the lieutenant and the sergeant and whoever it was, and took us down, tiptoeing, so that the people in the house wouldn't be in it. They probably heard it but there was nothing they could do about it. And in front of the house was a Jeep and another Jeep and a fire engine and an assistant fire engine and we sat -- we were sitting in the fire engine. Then we moved, moved out from that house and a few steps further, the whole gang stopped and we were made to lie on the floor and were made to hide and this military people were sitting on the benches and we were underneath the benches and it was the most amazing experience. And they made us hide because the whole group of military personnel, including the governor of Wolfson, had to go back to Wolfson and to officially transmit the key of the town to the Russian who came over that morning.

But it was not permitted to let the Germans know because it would have been a total disaster. All Germans were

terrified of Russians, and rightly so. They all knew what had happened in the war, the Russians are terrible people, particularly the, the military and they would rob and certainly they would rape and none of us wanted to have anything to do with them.

So he sneaked us into town and we had our dress and we were stopped, we were stopping and we saw him give that key to the Russian government and we sneaked out of town and about, I would say, half a mile out of town, the whole gang stopped and we were liberated and we were hugging each other, the Major and everybody else, and it was a real ending. So then we drove on and it was a whole escort, I don't know the name if you have -- convoy, that's the word, the whole convoy went to a town that was -- and that is very well known, Haldensleben(ph), which is a university town and it just so happened that my brother, who is an agricultural expert, had studied and gotten his degree in that university in Germany. But anyway we were -- we came in there and these -- this became the headquarter of Major Kelly and the first thing he did was he requisitioned a house for his family, everybody had to move out in a jiffy and we took over. Remember it was still war. It was not yet peace. The war was over on May 8th and we were liberated on April 25th, so there would still be some pieces that were not yet liberated.

Anyway, he put us into that house. He left his two precious guards to guard us and on that evening he brought tons and tons of food from the G.I.'s, from the military, heaped it into the house because he never knew when he would be back and when he had another opportunity to bring us food. Then we were given dresses and shoes, all the military guys were ordered to requisition dresses, etcetera. And we suddenly became ladies. And we became the family of Major Kelly, who from that moment on we called Uncle Jim. And we swore to each other that nobody's going to fall in love with him, and we don't want to have anything to do with him except that he's a good friend. And he was a marvelous man, a delightful, charming, marvelous man. Little bit grumpy sometimes, but anyway. So we stayed there for quite awhile.

My friend and I, we went to interpret for the court, that was in session at that time. The American court that was already in session in because it was already occupied by the Americans. And we worked there for awhile and then suddenly after two weeks, I think, it turned out that they had to move on. So he took us, just like in the good old days, the Indians took their wives along with when they moved, we went along with Uncle Jim from place to place to place. Wherever he was, we were.

And then we were supposed to go to a west -- to the

west totally, to the western zone headquarters, Weisbadden(ph) and Danskin(ph), but there was an episode in the meantime. My girlfriend met, by purely accident, a close friend of hers from school days who was at that time in a hospital as a physician, so he joined forces with us and we had him as a single man and Uncle Jim. But unfortunately what happened really is that during that time one of the girls broke her vows to us, the Polish girl who was the nurse in the camp and who had been with us, who was really not our friend, but we made friends with her because she fled with us, and she snatched Uncle Jim away, he fell in love with her and she, supposedly, fell in love with him. He was an old grandfather, but this girl didn't mind. And on the last stretch of our movements with the convoy, they suddenly abandoned us and we were literally left on the street without anyone. No food stamps, no money, no nothing. So the last stretch was not so funny, but it was a miraculous experience.

And then we went into town where there was military government seat and we walked in and wanted to speak to the commanding officer, having already had some experience in this field. But he was on vacation, and they said what do you want. We still didn't look so very amiable, with the yellow hair and all, and finally they gave us food stamps and some smart guy there requisitioned a house for us and moved the

Germans out. And we were installed there and we had to wait until the governing -- commanding officer returned from his vacation in order to get either further food stamps or a job or whatever. So this took about two more weeks in which we really recuperated.

And then we found the idol of our year, the governing -- the military government, the commanding officer by the name of Major Laggett(ph) at that time, who was really a Scotsman, but served in American Army, and became our best friend for a lifetime. And we still have him. He's just now turned 90, so that my girlfriend's mother and he lives in Oregon and we visit from time to time and we are still very close, as much as one can in this big country.

I started working for him as an interpreter and -- not private secretary, confidential secretary, because at that time they didn't have anybody who could take the place they were sure was not a Nazi and I spoke English and I typed, etcetera. My friend and her mother and her at that time fiancée, the young man that we had found...

Q: THE DOCTOR?

A: The doctor, they all started working in a hospital. And because I was a confidential secretary for the commanding officer and interpreted quite a lot to him, having had an interpreter's degree anyway, I was brought from Vienna



originally, it just so happened that Henry Kissinger was in that same detachment as a young, cocky serviceman, who was there to count Nazis and was headquarters of the C.I.C., Counter Intelligence Corp. And so I quite often interpreted for him as well. And that established a friendship and I still call him Henry, but I have frankly never taken -- I have seen him quite often before he went into the White House, but not since. And this, I think at this point is the end of the story.

Q: THANK YOU.

A: If I may add something to it.

Q: SURE. (TAPE OFF, TAPE ON)

A: When we were liberated, finally, after a lot of struggle, landed in the United States, or maybe even before that, my friend and mother were extremely talented in sewing and one of the first things they did was to use the material of our, of our striped gray and blue cloth and make a doll out of it, with the original items that we had worn. Consequently, that doll is equipped with the shoes out of which was taken literally from shoe leather that we still had and paper. The socks were still the same that we had cut up from the real socks. And the most amazing thing is the dress and the garter belt, because we had no rubber, nothing -- elastic to hold it, so we had to use string. And that string

was made of paper, twisted paper, you know, if you have cheap string to make a parcel with, and when it was raining it all dissolved itself into nothingness. And then we all - and then she put the number of the concentration camp, each, each of us had a number. It's a fully equipped doll, totally authentic, and anybody who would like to see it just has to go into the Jewish Museum here, on Russett Street in Berkeley, and this art exhibit there, I donated this to them.

Q: OH, I HAVE TO GO AND SEE IT. I'VE BEEN THERE BEFORE BUT I DON'T REMEMBER SEEING THAT.

A: Well, it was not always exhibited. I understand it is now.

Q: OH, I HAVE TO GO.

A: You'll have to ask the curator, because he knows where it is. But that's quite a story about this. That's one thing I wanted to add. And what was the other one?

Something very important that I think I'm unique in many ways, I was unique because I'm a fighter. I couldn't do anything like this now anymore. I'm a coward and I'm tired and I can't fight, but at that time I certainly was mad enough to fight. And when I left home, of course, without any jewelry, without anything, when I was dragged away by the Gestapo there was nothing that we could take along except that my mother gave me amulet on a brown string that just happened

to be, I don't even know from where. This and a little waterproof, what would that be, plastic with a souvenir from home. The string and the little souvenir from home wasn't wrapped in this and I do not believe that there is any other human being that was able to hide this in Auschwitz where we had to strip totally naked. All we had in our hands were the shoes and that string is here in my safe, with the plastic container, in which I have two little memories in there. And that is, indeed, unusual.

I was able to do this by stripping totally naked and clutching that string in the hand while they searched me naked. And searched the shoes. I would give them one pair of shoes -- one shoe and would hold my fist with the string in the other. And this is how I saved that little amulet and the string. That's the only thing I have from my mother literally.

That's the most amazing thing in my way, and the other amazing thing is in concentration camp, of course one wasn't able to correspond or to let anybody know anything. But next to us was a French forced labor camp and while we were not permitted to talk to each other, occasionally one would snatch a word or two, and again I was fortunate because I spoke French already then, and there was a little guy who told me one day that he's going to -- no, he didn't tell me

this, no. Who went to forced labor work every morning and they weren't as restricted as I was, they didn't have S.S. guards. They had guards but not S.S. guards. And they were permitted, I think, to write a letter per month, something like this. So I gave him my -- the address of my sister-in-law in Switzerland and asked him to send a word to her to tell her where I was and what happened, that I'm still alive. And this letter reached indeed my sister-in-law while we were in concentration camp.

Q: THAT IS AMAZING.

A: So these things I believe are unique.

Q: YOU WOULD THINK THAT ANY LETTERS THAT WOULD BE SENT OUT WOULD DEFINITELY BE CENSORED.

A: Oh of course, yes, but the French guy, when he would walk to work was not -- obviously was not under guard. I don't recall the details anymore, but he was able to mail that letter.

Q: THAT IS AMAZING. AND YOU GOT WORD OUT.

A: And he got word out and I had his name and after the war and after liberation I wrote to him and he wrote back, God knows who he was, he said he was with the city government. Well I believe it was with the city government from what I gathered. It was a very menial task he would do, garbage man or whatever, but I wouldn't have cared. But what I did care

is that he turned out to be an enraged communist. That is one of the reasons, probably, why he was in camp. So when he was liberated by whoever, I do not recall, the correspondence became a little way, way out, but it is an interesting story.

Q: THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

A: That's all.

Q: OKAY. THAT'S ALL.

A: That's enough. (TAPE ENDS)