

Interview with MADELINE PERKAREK

RG-50.481.0008

Tape 1 – Side A

Czechoslovakia

5.7

Father was president of the Congregation. First day of German occupation, a person came to their home, told to go where to get orders.

Father, rabbi, and others to get \$1,000,000. Asked town Jews to donate money by midnight Friday. Heavy pressure.

5.9

Father had a friend in the police, told names on a list to be taken. The first on the list committed suicide. The friend crossed out her father's name from the list.

6:00

Two to three months later to Ghetto, then to Auschwitz where women and men were separated. Older sister with a child and mother went to death. She and one sister saw father and brother one last time.

6:26

Later on, she and sister were sent to labor camp, and stayed there 10 days. Then to trains to Germany. Did not know where they were going. Five hundred women arrived. Some bombed places, but they were put in a not too bad place, where there was a bed for each person – 2 shifts (12 hours) day and night. Food was better than in Auschwitz. Fifty more women arrived, then there were three shifts of 8 hours. Made mine plates. She worked on different electric machines. Different changes made to work. Some time later, men who brought supplies, said: sometimes you'll have American coffee (code for Americans were close.) Went to bunkers at night, then to a wagon. Fallosleiden (name of previous camp?)

Train went, stopped and went (because of bombing). Finally arrived at Saltzvedo(?) Officers were French prisoners of war and were saying: Shalom.

7:30

Factory camp. Were constantly being counted. Cutting of electricity and water (by Americans). Big trucks full of food came from airport in, camp empty, tank comings.

On April 14, 1945, were liberated. One of happiest days. American came in trucks and took us to airport. Later English Army, then Russians. Situation became worse. Russians took to army country – 3 months, then to Prague on buses, then local train.

Sister with me all through camp. Although Madeline was younger, she became caretaker of sister.

8:30

In Prague to YMCA – fed and slept there. Went to Medical Station, she had a broken tibia. Got a message from brother-in-law saying he was in Prague. They met and lived in a decent camp. Brother-in-law invited into city where she got help with her leg. Minor problems continue up to present.

8:44

We were clean in winter. Yellow cross gave number.

9:07

Got happily married. Has two children. There until 1963. In 1964, came to U.S. A year later, husband died. Difficulties financially, mentally, etc. Worked in a sweatshop.

### Tape 1 – Side B

Description of life as a young girl in Auschwitz. Dehumanized feelings. Regular old, disinfected clothes. Block, 3 level bunks. Number came later. Selections by Mengele for work camp. Description of process. Stripped of clothes. If too thin, could not work. If passed, given shower and clothes. Stood all day long. Twenty people slept on one level. Lager not finished. Open latrines.

8:00

Train to Germany – To factory under an SS woman. Went directly to work, no training.

Describes work. There were all kinds of accidents. Didn't think of sabotage. The ones who did, were beaten up by the SS women. They were constantly counted. Food better than in Auschwitz.. Good living quarters, where German workers used to live. Double bunks, straw mattresses and two blankets. There were washing and shower rooms. Some additional clothing was available when cold increased. Yellow cross on the back of it, a number on a metal plate. Saved some papers and the metal plate.

Madeline and sister were together all the time. She was 19 years old and her sister was about 24. Both were well educated and sheltered until Hungarians came in. Sisters had different personalities. Although younger, Madeline was the protector.

9:09

When liberated, they were taken to an airport, and Germans came to clean their rooms, and they saw the Americans burning the camp. It was a good feeling. Do not know what happened to the French soldiers who had made sure that nothing would happen to them.

9:72

Three times a day there was food in the last camp. Black ersatz coffee was given for breakfast. For lunch – soup, and for dinner – soup. In Auschwitz, lost their period, last camp slowly it began again. After liberation, many women had problems. Some powder was added to coffee. Did not know what it was.

Tape 2 – Side A

5:6

Not hungry in last camp. There was a third helping of soup if one worked the night shift. More details about it. When painting they received milk. There was no kitchen. Food was brought in by truck. Sister always with her.

7:2

A lady working with an SS woman got “maybe” more food. Two other ladies (a mother and daughter) had a special room: infirmary, which was usually empty. There was less work towards end. Other Jewish women came into camp and cleaned roads.

Speaks about accommodations – barbed wires along a path that they could to walk on (springtime) for a short time.

13:80

Description of SS women. Main contact in factory but had no communication. . They punished when necessary, especially if someone was caught sabotaging. For disinfection, prisoners walked through woods. Once they saw an onion, pulled it from the ground, and ate it.

Were there any work accidents? (tape empty)

19:90

Did not do sabotage, worked well, and got extra food, shared with sister.

21:9

Doesn't know anything about issues of sexuality. Couldn't see if SS women did a lot of partying. There was no leisure time, after work: shower, food and then much needed sleep. Did not see any entertainment: singing, dancing, etc... Talks about some other women (infirmary and other). Interviewer asks if she knew woman named Brana who did the appel (count). Madeline did not know her.

24:3

Did any person die? She doesn't know, the pregnant lady was removed, but she doesn't remember. Baby lived two weeks and died on Christmas day (stated by questioner, Brana told him).

Tape 2 – Side B

39:6

New transports of women came to camp (50, the first one). She had no contact and knows nothing about them. In Prague, one woman told her that she had a message, but she did not know her.

41:33

Second transport never got in the factory. They cleaned the road of rubble. (Probably 3<sup>rd</sup> transport in March.) She didn't have anything to do with them.

Any solidarity among the women? There were never arguments, or fighting, no problems. They had soap, but from where, doesn't know. They had hot water, because it came from the factory and could not be turned off. Hand washing of paint, where, how? Doesn't remember. Protective clothes? She doesn't remember. Fumes in the air where the painting job was going on.

45:8

She understood and spoke a good German, also Czech, Hungarian, and now English. Story about the killing of a woman related to the interviewer, but she does not know anything about it, did not hear anything on the subject. If anybody got killed, sure the word would be passed around.

48:2

Details!

What did you and your sister talk about? We blocked out 99% of might have happened to the family. Found out later that mother, sister and niece had been gassed, but never knew what happened to her brother and father. Mostly talked about the war.

Talked a bit with two other ladies: one a writer, the other one a teacher. Elizabeth Senesh, the writer, had a manuscript at Yad Vashem. She was a quiet person, not a strong woman like Brana. Maybe emotional. Did she have any special function? Do not remember, probably worked.

55:4

Did she have a religious upbringing? Was raised Orthodox, but very, very modern  
Family was very respected in the city. People still know about family.

Religious practices in camp? No. No calendar in workplace. Holidays? Visits by high  
German Officials? Unaware of it.

59:7

Information about course of war? When men brought materials to the factory, they said a  
few words while unloading. Then word was spread around. Information and news was  
obtained in the "ladies' room" Arrived in September, the factory had been bombed  
before.

66:7

If I were thinking back before the war, I remember at home until 1944, that her father  
listened to BBC. They were well off and had a gorgeous home. They rented a furnished  
room to a policeman who was nice and friendly. When the Germans came in, went to  
police station and renter was there. He sat with the family and did not know what would  
happen. Did not know anything about "postcards" sent out from Auschwitz.  
Germans looked up all Jewish doctors in phone book and made the doctors contact  
Jewish organizations and have all Jews report to them.

Renter did not know anything. No word from Budapest. Renter helped family as much  
as possible.

### Tape 3 – Side A

67:8

About air raids? In Auschwitz, like a balloon, like a zeppelin, maybe something close.  
But there were no air raids in the three months when she was in camp. In Germany,  
heard about some air raids, but did not have to go to bunkers.

On one occasion only went to bunkers – one week later they were liberated. Doesn't  
know if she ever saw the camp commandant.

She has two children and three grandchildren, but still mourns loss of her family in the  
Holocaust.